UNDER THE TRICOLOUR

By PIERRE MILLE

Illustrated By HELEN McKIE

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Under the Tricolour

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TRANSLATED BY B. DRILLIEN

TWO LITTLE PARISIANS

IN PREPARATION

TRANSLATIONS OF

LA VASTE TERRE

BARNAVAUX ET LOUISE

THE BODLEY HEAD

HELEN
MACK

UNDER THE TRICOLOUR

BY PIERRE MILLE

BEING THE AUTHORISED TRANSLATION BY BÉRENGÈRE DRILLIEN OF *BARNAVAUX ET QUELQUES FEMMES* WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY HELEN McKIE

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Under the Tricolour

MARIE-FAITE-EN-FER

I NEVER knew her real name, nor whether she possessed a surname like the rest of the world, nor even the name her mother bore before her, for her father may as well be left out of the question. The profession she followed was one condemned by Society.

To induce her to leave her native land, the fellow who enticed her to Africa had said that her destination was only a little beyond Marseilles; that there was just a calm strip of sea to cross, and that in a few hours she would find herself in a country exactly like France, but where the men were more generous.

For days she had been standing on the second-class deck, gazing over the never-ending sea, in search of the houses, the cafés and the boulevards of Port-Ferry, whither she was bound in the company of Pasiphae, a languorous blonde, and Carmen, a Wallachian girl.

At the end of three weeks the steamer stopped at the mouth of a yellow river whose sullen waters flowed between two low banks, and the first things that greeted the eye on landing were crosses erected in the mud. Such then was Port-Ferry, the starting-point of a new conquest, the centre of the Empire to come, where the victors lived in huts of wood and straw, half-buried in the swamp. Eight hundred men, clad in white or khaki, were there, however, to cheer Marie, Pasiphae and Carmen, the steamer that had brought them and the man who had sent them there.

Carmen and Pasiphae wept bitterly: "We shall die here," they said, "we are sure to die!"

They examined their dwelling-place where henceforth they had to live and ply their trade. Bamboo, pasted over with old advertisements that ironically reminded them of Paris, formed the walls. A sullen darkness, which fell like a black pall across the beds, pervaded the windowless room, whilst through the open door came the more hardy of the men, to whom in future they would belong.

"We shall die here! We shall die!"

Marie looked at them astonished, understanding neither their terror nor their tears. It is a great mistake to be too conscious of what is in store for one if it is inevitable, and Marie's indifference saved her the anguish of her companions.

In Paris she had been through nameless miseries, had slept in wretched dens, had risked her life and known the brutality of men; and she swore that she would not die.

Thus it came about that three months later, when she had followed the blonde Pasiphae and Carmen to their last resting-place in the sorrowful little cemetery where the wooden crosses stood, she alone remained, fearless, calm and proud as of a victory. She felt that her brown, tanned body and perfect health could withstand all dangers, and that she reigned alone now, a queen, who distributed her favours impartially, for by the queer inversion of moral value that gives another outlook and another code to women of her caste she held the firm conviction that it was her duty so to do.

The only white woman, she reigned there, kind, gentle and peace-bringing, ignoring her shame, which one and all had long since forgotten, and when Barnavaux—who had

re-enlisted for the third time in the Colonial infantry—the word-creator, the maker of local notables, as Warwick was the King-maker, christened her Marie-faite-en-Fer, she accepted this as a tribute and carried the name proudly, as in years gone by the Sultan Mahmoud, surnamed the Victorious, bore his.

She ruled, I say, and knew no rival. Battalion followed battalion; she witnessed the expansion of Port-Ferry, she saw the first brick houses rise, course upon course, and the building of the harbour. She saw the first galvanised iron roofs, a sign of coming luxury, and of the settlement of the African possessions. She remembered the dark days of struggle, when fever laid low so many, never to rise again.

It happened that one summer was much wetter than usual; instead of torrent succeeding torrent, each in its turn to be dried up by the sun, the rain fell steadily, heavy and grey, week after week, just as it does in Europe, soaking through the thatched roofs, filling the dried-up ditches, swelling the river until it overflowed and looked like a lake.

The grasses grew apace, and at times

deep down in the thick undergrowth could be heard the crash of some mighty tree, which shook the earth around in its fall; some ancient tree, decayed with age, dragged down by the weight of rain-drenched leaves, and the sodden lichen that covered it. And out of the decayed monster sallied myriads and myriads of flies.

"I know what is going to happen, it's a bad sign! What will become of our poor children?" She had got into the habit of alluding to the soldiers as "our children."

The Major frowned, for he knew too well what was to happen.

He looked at the eyes of the first man who came to him, complaining of a terrible pain in his head, and ordered him to bed forthwith. Later that evening Marie-faite-en-Fer said to the Major:

"Weren't his eyes very bright? and now his nose has begun to bleed. It's yellow fever?"

"Yes," said the Major sorrowfully.

"Our poor children! What can we do?"

"Nothing," he replied, "but to rub them with lemon juice, inject quinine, and last of all give them morphia to dull the pain

and make death a little easier. That's all that can be done, and it's little enough, God knows!

"The great thing is to save the men who are not infected: we must keep off the mosquitoes some way or another. It's the rain that has driven the brutes to carry disease wherever they go. A man bitten is a dead man.

"Only to think that for the past six years we've been applying to the Government for mosquito nets. Now it will be too late when we do get them. Marie, make yourself a net and close up your window with a muslin dress if you have nothing better."

"What do I matter?" she answered.

Nevertheless, next day she brought the Major five nets that she had been up all night making. And that was the commencement of an heroic struggle.

They bought up all the muslin from the traders, and Marie became the head of a great workroom. With her own hands she nailed up the frail barriers that were to ward off their tiny enemies, and every night, when the air was filled with their ghastly humming, a sound more terrible than a

bugle sounding the call to arms in a beleaguered city, Marie went round and saw that all her ramparts were holding good.

Ah, it would be false and foolish to disguise matters! They still came to her on other business.. Do you think there are many who, on the approach of cold death, against whom neither muscular strength nor buoyant spirits avail, have the courage to endure alone their terror, if they can go to the shelter of some woman's breast, like little children?

Marie accompanied many of these terror-stricken lovers to their last sleep in the coffin-like hut, where the Major, with his mocking opium and useless quinine, helped them to die. And of those who chanced to recover, not one but had seen the woman's tender face bending over his pillow.

. . . . . .

The rain ceased, the dry season returned with the fresh sea breezes, and the mud in the cemetery was left in peace. Then an Inspector-General arrived from France to revive the courage of the men and to take those tardy precautions which always come too late. And, as nothing could be done

for the dead, he came to praise the living for remaining alive.

The survivors, with those of their officers who had escaped, marched past him with their rusty arms and creaking gun-carriages, which, by the way, were drawn by themselves, as all the horses had died. And, led by the Major, behind this stricken company came Marie-faite-en-Fer, abashed and awkward, protesting that she did not know why they wanted her.

"Our Sister of Mercy," said the Major, as he presented her to the General.

The General already knew all about her. He saluted her very gravely; with all his heart he saluted her, before the men, the officers and the colours.

"I have not the power to decorate you, madame," said he. "Will you permit me to embrace you?"

Never in all her life had Marie-faite-en-Fer been asked such a question: "Will you permit me to embrace you?" And she wept.

. . . . . .

Towards evening she was sitting in front of her house. Through the open door could be seen a low bed, draped with scarlet,

like the beds that used to be at Suburre and that may yet be found in the low quarters of Marseilles and Toulon.

A great joy filled Marie's heart, yet she longed to die, for she knew that life could never give her anything so glorious as the happiness she had that day enjoyed.

While musing, she heard the creaking of gun carriages, and, looking up, saw them coming down the road towards her, rolling along on their big wheels; but they were transformed that evening into a veritable garden of flowers. Beautiful red hibiscus stood out against the polished steel, mauve flowers from the great thorn trees, and branches of mimosa. Yes, rolling towards her was a mass of perfume drawn by the whole garrison, who cried out:

"Here are flowers; flowers for Marie-faite-en-Fer!"

And Barnavaux, with his clear, blue eyes shining under his helmet, was the first *marsouin*[1] to file before her. He threw a coin on her knees:

"Here's a piaster, Marie, a piaster!"

She looked at the coin as though awakened from a dream and said:

[1] A soldier of the Marine Infantry.

"Ah, true! I had forgotten. Come in, Barnavaux.."

"No," said Barnavaux; "to-day is a holiday for everybody. 'Tis an order from headquarters, and now you belong to the regiment, you know!"

She looked puzzled while the others, the three hundred survivors, each dropped a shining coin at her feet and went their way.

"Fall in! Sleep well, Marie!"

For some time she remained amazed at the sight of all this treasure, these scattered coins that almost frightened her.

It seemed as though they could not belong to her because they came from a pure source, and she felt they had not been earned.

She picked them up and with trembling fingers put them into a bag.

It was quite dark when she went to the General. "I can't keep all this," she said, as he looked at her in silence. "I can't put this money with—with the other. Is there enough to found a bed in the new hospital they are going to build?"

And that is why to-day, in the hospital at Port-Ferry, there is a bed that bears

on a white tablet this inscription: No. 1. Fondation Marie-F. . . .

And this story is perfectly true.

. . . . . .

Now I'll try to tell you how Marie loved and how she died. I don't mean to say that she died of love, though it is true that people in real life do sometimes die of love. However, I will make no rash statements; and, if the great passion that Marie cherished for the Major was to some extent connected with her end, she at any rate never said as much to anyone and carried her secret away with her.

A woman must always preserve some sort of chastity, and Marie's profession forbade any chastity of the body, though she owned instead the great, pure passion of the soul.

It came to her in the first place because he had glorified her before them all. She could not forget the day when the General had saluted and embraced her before the flag as though she were some fine lady. She could not forget the day when the men brought her flowers; nor the longer, dearer days when the fever raged and she had matters to attend to other than the sad duties of her trade.

It was the Major who led her forward, saying before them all, "Our Sister of Mercy!" She had worked with him. With him she had risked her life while the men were dying like flies round them. She had given him all her heart, and worshipped him timidly and in silence.

She had never dared ask anything of him save his portrait and that of his little daughter at home in France, for he was married. He had given in to her request, making her promise, however, never to show the portraits to anyone. Marie was true to her word, but when alone in her room she gazed at them by the hour as though they were of priceless value.

The thought that the Major had a child of his own gave her both pleasure and pain. Her mind was so full of them both, that at times she dreamed the whole night through of a happiness that she knew would never be hers, for her sound common sense was not to be deluded. She reproached herself, moreover, for having ideas above her station.

The negro children around soon discovered that they could get what they wanted from her; the little girls, some of whom wore

necklaces of glass beads, *real* glass beads —a priceless treasure—and had their hair dressed in true native fashion, falling down their backs in a woolly twist with the end turned up like a duck's tail, brought their dolls.

They would stay the whole day through in front of Marie's cabin, playing with their *képé-soukous*, two husks filled with pebbles which jingled like bells. They would roll each other in the dust, "to be like white people," and Marie would first bribe them with sugar and then wash them clean.

The parents of these children came to look upon her as a good witch possessed of great powers, for the homage paid her during the fever epidemic had not escaped them. They concluded that she had overcome the disease by her marvellous powers of magic.

Sometimes she would be present at the birth of a child. She never offered any assistance, but would stay quietly while the woman lay groaning upon her bed of straw, and the belief sprang up that her presence alone was sufficient to heal the sick and keep away the evil spirits.

Time went on, and to her surprise Marie-faite-en-Fer became aware that the health and strength, of which she had been so proud, were deserting her. Sudden waves of heat would envelop her, followed by feelings of faintness; her skin became waxen in its pallor and, among other things that distressed and humiliated her, she had daily attacks of fever.

Doctors call this malady "tropical anæmia," in learned terms which signify little except a great desire to die. Death always comes to those attacked by this illness, death in which, overcome by a great weariness and with no regrets to trouble them, they sink to sleep. They have no fear of death, because it is so much easier to die than to live; so much better to lie quiet than to move. Youth is of no avail. The mind is full of a calm melancholy like that of the very aged, and they gently pass beyond. Marie-faite-en-Fer was passing beyond.

She had never known a moment's peace of mind since her great happiness, and now she lay dying. Everywhere round her things had changed so much that she hardly knew them for the same. The town had grown;

there were big houses now with terraces and verandas. Civilians were slowly but surely outnumbering the military, a fact that filled her with amazement, and these civilians brought with them their wives, who drew away from Marie as she passed.

There was a Residency and a brick-built church, where the one-time officer of Zouaves, Father Felix, was *curé*. They had also built a hospital and Marie was invited to the opening day, when they showed her "her bed," and some one, in making a speech, mentioned her name casually and with reserve, for the town had changed since the advent of the virtuous women. Marie, however, did not bother about these virtuous ladies: the thing that troubled her was the sight of real Sisters of Mercy standing beside "her bed," the bed that she had founded. She had never expected that. Truly, her heroic rôle was well over. Henceforth she would be only Marie-faite-en-Fer, a courtesan. Perhaps she did not state it to herself quite so precisely, but her spirit revolted, and her weakened frame was filled with loathing.

Mercifully, death came without much

suffering, at the end of the fast of Ramadan, as night began to fall, the night awaited so impatiently by the native converts to Islam. At last the sun disappeared, leaving, like a bursting shell, a blazing track of light upon the horizon; and, while this light lingered in the sky, towards the east the first crescent of the moon appeared. For a while its whiteness was scarcely to be seen in the pale blue sky, like a scratch from one's nail upon a marble table. Then from all the earthern walls of the darkened town, and from all the streets, rose a great cry, a salute to the stars' return, to the start of the nocturnal fête.

Numbers of native women sallied forth from the dingy houses, priestesses of the night revels; sisters in infamy of Marie-faite-en-Fer. One could hear, as they gathered in groups, the jingle of copper bands upon their slim ankles.

A last smile came to Marie's lips at the thought that she at last might rest for ever; and a few hours later she passed away.

. . . . . .

She had refused to admit the *curé* of Port-Ferry. The arrival of the Sisters of Mercy had roused her. She was vaguely jealous

of these triumphant rivals and of the "Holy Virgin" they brought with them, and her anger burst forth at times in language better not repeated. Remember she was neither a virtuous woman nor a fine lady!

But the ex-officer of Zouaves, who had given up military discipline only to enlist in the army of Christ, knew too well her past life to strain at a gnat. He insisted that the remains of Marie-faite-en-Fer, now purified by death, should enter in at the church gates and that all those who had known her—and we know how they had known her—should bear her to her last bed, chaste and terrible in the grandeur of death.

"Our poor little mother," cried Barnavaux; "our poor little mother!"

Yet he did not forget that she had been another thing to him. Men do not forget these things, so perhaps it is better not to dwell on the memories that moved Barnavaux to tears.

Yes, it was the last of her lovers, the remnant who had outlived the fever days, who were to carry Marie to her grave. And Father Felix did not fear to call them to her side. She had owned all the virtues save

one, he said, and that one the selfishness and sensuality of man had not permitted her to cultivate. As that was the only virtue wanting, he confidently commended her sorrowful soul to God's good mercy.

It may be that Father Felix was not very eloquent, but I quote the words he spoke, for I've no mind to change this plain story, nor to seek to add to it with words that are untrue.

There is something more to add, however, if all the truth is to be known, and I find it hard to say it without giving offence. The blacks who, in their ignorance, see wonders in everything and everybody, would not abandon the worship they had bestowed upon the "Good Witch" during her lifetime. So, in their own fashion, they built her a tomb of baked clay, and ornamented it with little whitewashed turrets. And to show it was really Marie-faite-en-Fer and no other whose spirit rested there, and no doubt continued to work miracles, they put her statue, cut in hard wood, among the turrets. They were not great artists, nor did they imagine that the figure was like her, but they took care that all could see that the naked body was that of a woman;

no mistake was to be possible on that score.

Thus by hands naturally obscene, yet pious, they perpetuated the memory of Marie-faite-en-Fer with her great heart, and her body offered to all.

THE LEPERS' ISLAND

"MEN have leave to go ashore!" Again the bugle sounded on the deck of the *Iraouaddy*, the non-commissioned officers repeating the command, while some thirty men of the Colonial infantry filed before them, upright and spotless in their white helmets and brass-buttoned tunics.

In front of us, standing out black against the rising sun was the Island of Zanzibar, where the French steamers for Tamatave put into port.

The fresh morning breeze reached the ironclad heavy with the smell of the land, a thousand different smells in fact, in which one could distinguish vaguely the reek of broken sea-shells and dead fish left by the receding tide; the scent of figs and mangroves opening out in the morning air, of orange trees and shaddocks, the bitter, sensuous perfume of the lemon trees, and that of the pepper-plants, which burns the nostrils, parches the throat and gets into one's head.

Odours delightful and odours distasteful, but which, none the less, make the heart beat faster with joy, for they proclaim the proximity of mother earth with her houses, her woods and her women.

I had intended to go ashore in one of the ship's boats, and looked round for my friend Barnavaux. Barnavaux, who has been three times a sergeant, twice reduced for breach of discipline and once for misbehaviour. Barnavaux, who has seen so much of the world that nothing now interests him, and who is so full of wisdom that he sleeps when not compelled to work—that is to say, unless he happens to be drinking! Barnavaux, who knows everything, who has every imaginable vice, and makes no secret of it. Barnavaux, who will never be anything but a soldier, and for whom I cherish a regard greater than I shall ever have for another, because he can tell in his own direct way, as no other can, of all that he feels, of all that he sees, of all the things that happen about him.

He will reveal himself to you in these pages as he has shown himself to me in different countries. Sometimes in a sharp action, at others by a simple gesture.

HELEN
M. CRANE

Soldier-like, he has no life story. He was born one day and some day he will die, that's all. The things that he does are not of himself; they have purpose only in relation to the greater purpose of which he is but an unconscious unit. Have you never seen a bird, an eagle or hawk, rise suddenly from the surface of a lake and, hovering for a moment or two above it, disappear? It only held your attention for an instant, yet each time that you look upon those still waters and silent rocks and woods your memory will recall that bird. Thus is Barnavaux remembered.

. . . . . .

I found him in the forecastle sitting upon a pile of ropes, one foot bare and the other in an old sandal, and his coarse canvas shirt wide open, showing his bare, brown breast. He was wearing a helmet, 'tis true, on account of the sun, a "second-best" as it were; a sorry, finger-stained relic, that he had not even troubled to pipeclay.

"Barnavaux," I said, "you are under punishment then?"

"No, I'm not," he replied, looking up at me with a melancholy air, "no, I'm not. I don't want to go to Zanzibar, that's all."

We could see the harbour, the wood and iron jetties and the Sultan's great palace, since destroyed by the English, as a lesson to his Majesty that the first duty of a protected prince is to leave the management of his country severely alone. On the right could be seen the gardens unfurling their waving foliage down to the sea, and beyond the gardens the open country, with its baobabs, which looked like great beetroots in which a child had planted branches in play. They are typically "nigger" trees, big, stupid and corpulent, like a well-to-do negro.

The strains of a mechanical piano reached us from the quay, with tunes at two sous a time, warlike, sentimental or voluptuous, proclaiming the existence of wine-booths and women, and all the fierce, primitive joys of men long prisoned behind walls of steel and iron, and freed for a while.

"Barnavaux," I said, "surely you're going ashore, aren't you?"

"No," he replied, "no, thanks. I know all about it. Yes, I know all about it," he repeated. "You drink and drink, and there are plenty of women, Blacks, Hindus, Japs and Wallachians. I've seen enough

of that sort of thing; besides, it generally ends up badly."

Old memories were troubling him, and I could see that for the first time in his life he feared to review the past, or to speak of it.

"Barnavaux," I suggested, "I'll keep you company here, then, if you'll tell me about it, will you?"

He began, but seemed timid and hesitating, and I had never known him to be timid or to hesitate!

"There was Ranaive and a little Hindu girl——" Then, interrupting himself, "No, that's not it. Do you know anything about leprosy?"

"Leprosy?"

"Yes. You don't, I see. You imagined that it only existed years and years ago, and was now practically a thing of the past. Well, you were mistaken, that's all. There are no lepers in France, but Africa has plenty of them, and also Asia and Oceania. And when Europeans visit such countries, as we are doing now, they're just as likely to get it as the natives themselves.

"It is hardly noticeable at first, this

leprosy. You don't even know that you've got it; then small red spots show on the palms of your hands, then a little place appears, in shape like an oak leaf, then comes—well, I don't know what that gnaws away the joints of your hands, legs and feet. The marks spread over the head and then to the forehead and after that the whole face swells and wrinkles. The mouth becomes like a snout, and the ears stand away from the head. One sometimes sees men and women come to resemble lions, and to look grand and majestic in the near approach of death.

"And they die horribly, piecemeal. The fingers first fall off, then the arms and legs and the other members. I've often wondered what remains to be buried at the end. It is the oldest disease in the world and the only one that covers all the earth. Europeans have their small-pox and consumption, which are not known here; in America there is yellow fever, and the niggers die of the sleeping sickness, but leprosy is everywhere, as though it had been scattered by the first families of man at the breaking up of

the tower of Babel, that the Bible tells us about."

"Barnavaux," I said, amazed, "what makes you think that?"

"I don't know," he replied, himself astonished. "I only think that must be the reason."

We both mused awhile, and I saw, in my mind's eye, the early migrations of men, armed only with weapons of stone, spreading, as they founded their first communities upon the vast, void tracks of the earth, this dread disease, traces of which we still find the world over, even upon the remains lying in the most ancient tombs.

I saw these first families developing into the different races, each with its peculiar scourge. Then came the ships, and, as they mingled the races of mankind, so they mingled their maladies.

And now reappeared the oldest of them all, the universal and almost forgotten leprosy.

"Well," went on Barnavaux, "some ten years ago, when a young soldier, I was sent to Zanzibar to receive the mules that were at times landed there before shipment to

Madagascar for the Tananarivo expedition.

"Now you've *got* to have a good time at Zanzibar, you must enjoy yourself, it's a stopping-place, as it were, on the road to death. Yes, death, whether it is in the trenches of the railroad that the English are building in Uganda, or in the Transvaal mines, or in the German colonies which possess nothing but fevers, hippopotami and drunken, high-born German officers, or in Madagascar itself where we have left so many of our comrades. Thus it is to keep men from thinking that they provide drinking-booths and women, whole streets of women, gathered from every country under the sun.

"Ranaive was my chum. You never met Ranaive and you never will now; presently I will tell you why, though very likely he is not quite dead even yet. He was a good sort, quite a good sort, though I wouldn't have let a sister of mine marry him. His mother was a woman of Madagascar and his father possibly a half-caste from the island of Mauritius, but one can't be sure, he never really knew himself.

"He made his living by marrying the daughters of chiefs in the Madagascar and Mozambique bush. It's a very good living too, provided one has sufficient goods. You leave part of your goods with your father-in-law, who is responsible for their sale, and you go off to another tribe and marry another chief's daughter, and repeat the process. When you have married about ten times in, say, ten years, you can wind up your affairs, sell out to your wives and fathers-in-law, and retire a rich man; and you've seen life in the meanwhile.

"I suppose it was his trade that made him so free and easy with women. He was bold—bolder than I am!"

"That's saying much," I ventured politely.

Barnavaux seemed flattered at my remark, but went on with his story:

"In the Rue des Marchands-d'Argent lived a little Hindu girl, pretty as they all are, prettier, in fact, for she'd Portuguese blood in her. I'm told that the Portuguese held India years ago.

"On the strength of her Portuguese blood she called herself Da Silva, like some fine lady. She was no better than the other

girls, but prouder on account of the white strain that was in her. And Ranaive didn't please her. That sort of thing happens sometimes, and when it does it is better not to insist; but one evening I think Ranaive insisted."

I nodded my head to show that I understood.

"And never," he continued, "have I seen a blow like the one she struck him. Don't laugh! You mustn't think that a blow is of small account in Zanzibar, or on a par with the same thing, in Paris, say, among civilised folk. The dignity of the white man is at stake, and Ranaive was looked upon as a white. So Mademoiselle Draoupady was condemned in the English court to pay a fine of £8 sterling or to go to gaol for a month.

"Ah, I'll never forget the way that she refused to pay the fine, saying that she had only been defending herself. And I can still see the curve of her back, her plump shoulders in the little oval jacket embroidered with gold and purple flowers, and the narrow line of copper-coloured skin showing above the baggy trousers. All her little body quivered under the insult,

and I shall always remember her eyes! Turning to Ranaive I said:

"'My friend, you'd better clear!'

"'Clear? Where and what for?' he asked.

"'Wherever you like. Return to your Madagascar and Mozambique ladies, but don't stop here! We haven't seen the end of this business.'

"He replied by a shrug of his shoulders.

"When a month later Draoupady came back to her place behind the bar, I thought I'd been mistaken, so quiet did she seem, and only avoided meeting Ranaive's eye. But we were all surprised when, a few days after leaving prison, she married, with much decorum, a leper detective."

"What?" I cried.

"Yes, it's an English invention. Now, do you think that life would be livable if you felt that leprosy was dogging your footsteps, moving invisibly around you, waiting, as it were, to be contracted by a mere touch: the touch of your hand upon a handrail, upon a glass, upon anything, in fact? It is not, mind you, when the disease is fully developed, when the limbs are dropping off, when one is

confronted with the lion-like heads that I've told you about that the leper is to be dreaded. You know him when you see him, and can flee. But it is in the early stages, at the very beginning, just when the little, almost imperceptible, red marks are appearing, when the very victims themselves are as yet ignorant of their doom, that the danger lies. Do you understand me? Well, then, there are people who are able to recognise the disease in its beginning; they have a peculiar gift in that direction. So the English call them 'leper detectives.' They go everywhere, they pause in the market places; talk to you in the cafés and at the women's houses: everywhere seeking their prey.

"When denounced by them, the white man, that is to say the *real* white man can demand a doctor's certificate and a passage to Europe, but for the native or the half-caste, there's an island for them in the Seychelles, and a police boat that takes them there, never to be seen or heard of again. Now can you see the drift of my tale?"

"What?" I cried, "not Ranaive?"

"Yes. The leper detective denounced him; he had him for his prey."

"But was he a leper?"

"A leper!" said Barnavaux, "no, I swear not. He was as healthy as I am now. But you may be sure that he has leprosy by this time; he has got it over there!

"Perhaps you understand now why I'm not anxious to go ashore!"

He seemed to be living these things over again and shuddered with horror. Yet he is a hardened sinner and his morals are neither those of a priest nor a maiden, and were he to make full confession he could tell of deeds that would make you creep. But the cold vengeance of this woman stunned him. He added:

"I forgot to tell you that the lepers' island is named Félicité on the maps; and a pretty fine hell it must be!"

BARNAVAUX VICTORIOUS

TO the left of the old wet-dock at Toulon, opposite the grey keel of the *Belle-Poule*, and on the other side of the cells where, in the dark days, they kept the convicts, the torpedo destroyers of to-day now ride at anchor. They slumber there wisely, with a kindly feeling for the old cannons bound to earth. Lying low upon the water, with their stumpy funnels, light spars and slender rigging, they look like big sick fishes, in whose back a mischievous child had planted bobbins and needles and thread.

In the morning the sailors come off them in squads, making for things that look like drinking-troughs upon the quay, but which, in reality, contain soft water for washing. Then, taking off their jerseys and stripping to the waist, they rub their sturdy bodies briskly, the muscles of their backs bunching and rolling in response to their movements. The sun beats down upon them, and their

young eyes sparkle under their flickering lashes.

Should you wish to see this for yourself, and it is the finest sight in Toulon because it is so full of life and movement, go on beyond the wet-dock, behind some old buildings now almost demolished, but that, doubtless, served their day in some manner or another, and along a road neither paved nor macadamised, made of nothing, in fact, but mud and water, cinders and broken glass.

The air is full of the odour of fresh caught fish and decaying rubbish, of salt straight from the sea and the stale salt of brine pickle, even of the scent of flowers in the springtime—there are literally too many of them in the heart of the country and the smell penetrates on every hand.

Near the jetty that separates the old wet-dock from the roadstead cowers a dirty, disreputable, old house with very few windows and plenty of roof, and, to make it even more antiquated and ridiculous, it bears the following legend in big letters upon the dingy wall: *Fanfare des Boers: siège social*, and at the side of this inscription can be read in smaller letters: *Caveau*

des Boers, which is to indicate, I imagine, that the Society drinks.

. . . . . .

As I passed this queer pub, pondering how any human being could ever have the courage to stop there for a drink, a man emerged wiping his mouth. He was a Colonial infantryman, wearing the red-striped trousers, the heavily-strapped tunic and shiny buttons of his corps. He had a fair beard and a thin face, with bright eyes, and a skin the colour of papier mâché: one of the sort called *crevards*[1] in those parts because they have indulged in, and survived, every malady under the sun, and although they appear played out they don't seem able to die. That's what they call a *crevard* and they are among the very best.

It was Barnavaux, no other than Barnavaux. He called out:

"So you don't recognise me then! Are you on strike or have you become Emperor of Germany, or what?"

I have said that one must never be surprised at meeting Barnavaux in any odd

[1] Die-hards.

corner; he turns up just when he ought to. I had only to excuse myself, so I made my apology and, more for the sake of something to say and for the want of a better remark, I asked:

"What are you doing here then?"

Barnavaux threw a glance towards the town, then, with the greatest coolness and a strong Provençal accent, he replied:

"I await events!"

Now Barnavaux has no right to that accent, he is not of the south, nor Parisian either, the latter much to his chagrin. I found out once that he hailed from Choisy-le-Roi, but he keeps that information to himself. The mere fact that he had adopted the accent of Marseilles showed me that there was no love lost between the townsfolk and himself.

He always comes direct to the point, "The hands at the Arsenal," he muttered, opening one eye and closing the other, then making the gesture of a man about to strike a blow.

I may as well state, once and for all, that having regard to the disturbances and disputes that rack my unhappy country I have adopted the point of view of a "Con-

stitutional Anarchist," which, being my own invention, and as yet unpromulgated, enables me to disagree with every one. So in a voice tinged with reproach I demanded of Barnavaux what the men at the Arsenal had done to him.

"Done? *they* never do anything," he replied with indignation.

"And what about yourself?"

Barnavaux is not like me, he brings honesty to bear upon a discussion. Reflecting a moment he said:

"I do nothing either!" Then after further reflection he added:

"Nobody ever does do anything in Toulon bar the fishermen and they only put to sea twice a week, and that's enough for them too. It's the climate here; it's altogether too nice. The admirals go off to Paris; the other officers do the same, or go to balls or opium dens, and the whole lot of us hang round the cafés. It's only when aboard again that we've got to stick to it. But these Arsenal fellows never go aboard; for them it's always leave. That's the unfairness of it all."

Contemplation once more settled on his forehead and he declared:

"There is a gulf fixed between us and them, the gulf of *esprit de corps*."

"I should like an explanation of that," said I.

"Oh, certainly," he returned; "but you know well enough that it consists in looking down on all other corps."

Doubtless he realised the admiration his profound remark aroused in me, for he went on:

"These things are not mere theories; they are real religions, as it were. Such religion, as far as *marsouins* and sailors are concerned, is the conviction that landsmen are a pack of fools, more especially the police."

"Why the police?" I asked.

"You don't mean to say," demanded Barnavaux, staggered at my ignorance, "that you didn't know; it's because they don't belong to the army nor to the navy. They depend on the Ministry of the Interior, just like——" He was seeking a term to express the contempt that he felt. At last he hit upon it——"like journalists!" he said.

"Barnavaux," said I, "you leave literature alone! What is your reason for being so down on the police?"

"Oh, they've never got the upper hand of me yet," returned Barnavaux, with pardonable pride. "No, on the contrary, I once beat a policeman in a curious naval combat. It is one of the finest pages in the history of the Colonial infantry."

I knew what was expected of me. I went to the *Caveau des Boers*, and bought two bottles of the celebrated white Cassis wine, made in that locality, a loaf and some slices of smoked sausage. We then directed our steps to the jetty and sat down.

Opposite us was the harbour, looking as though it were closed in on all sides like a lake. From where we were it seemed to be square, and as though dug out of the land and hills which apparently hemmed it in. The hills, like those behind the town, were practically covered in places with box and myrtles, and in other parts were desolate. Old, old hills they were, dried up by the sun and worn by the rain. The calm water looked at the sky and the cloudless sky looked at the water. Huge masses stood out towards the south and west; ironclads and cruisers huddled

together, their steel turrets and fighting tops set one thinking of some great stronghold, some fantastic fairy castle fallen from the mountains into the sea. They looked too huge for the flat, liquid surface on which they remained motionless.

Little white specks hurried continually along with remarkable celerity, steam and motor-launches and yachts, and the tops of buoys, looking like gigantic saucepan-lids painted a bright red, floated on the blue water.

"Here," said Barnavaux, "is the scene of my great victory. It happened the last time the Russian fleet came. My traps and my hammock were aboard the *Amiral-Charner* that was to sail for Crete the following morning, but that night we were all free to celebrate the visit of our friends and allies. Ah, we may entertain the English fleet, or that of Italy, even the German—for you never know what will happen next in this god-forsaken country—but never, no, never, shall we get as tight as we did the night the Russians were here. It's gospel-truth, on the word of a Colonial infantryman!

"First of all we went for the *apéritif*

to the *Bar du Cygne et de la Galère*, on the way to Mourillon, where there was a blind man playing the piano like a gentleman. He was so tight that he cried all over his piano and played a cakewalk under the impression that it was the Russian National Anthem; but the Russians didn't care.

"After that we went to the *Perle de la Méditerranée*, to the *Restaurant du Pôle Nord*, and then to the *Grand Bar des Pacifiques* where we had a fight with some Norwegians, I can't remember what about. We then went to get something to eat at the *Reine des Rascasses*, a very swagger place. After that we began all over again at the *Bar du Cygne et de la Galère*. I can't remember where we went after that. I know we went everywhere, and, of course, to the *Pavé d'Amour*.

"What a night it was! What a night! The streets were full of men in women's clothing and women with no clothes at all. The piano-organs wouldn't play, because the sailors had filled them up with water and were paddling in them. Some gigantic Russians were marching along carrying a

woman under each arm, carrying them the Lord knows where—they certainly didn't!

"We smashed up marble tables and staved in doors. A man came along, selling those red balloons for children, and a French sailor bought the lot, perhaps a hundred altogether, for forty francs. He tied a lighted match in the middle of the mass and let them go, just for the fun of seeing the blaze. They did make a fine blaze, as a matter of fact, for they pitched on a thatched roof, and set fire to it, and when the firemen arrived on the scene we made *them* drunk. It *was* a night and no mistake!

"The name of the sailor who had bought the balloons was Plévech, and he was a proud man that night, you bet! He told me that the Breton meaning for Plévech was 'Le Poilu,' and that he intended to perform many wonderful deeds that night because of his name and his riches, and to prove his words I went along with him.

"As we were going along the Boulevard Sainte-Hélène we saw a mason's truck filled with bricks, a bag of cement, a hod and a

trowel. The truck looked to us as though it needed a change of air, so we pushed it along in front of us.

"A little later Le Poilu was of the opinion that we ought to do something to raise the corrupt morals of the people and that, therefore, we should make use of the contents of the truck to brick up the door of Madame Angèle, who was not so virtuous as she might have been.

"On the way to Madame Angèle's house we passed the residence of Monsieur Poulard, the *commissaire aux vivres*, who suffers from a curious disease. Whenever he finds himself in the company of others he feels suddenly giddy, and as though he were about to faint. He is never well unless he is alone. They call it ago——"

"Agoraphobia," I suggested.

"That's it. Well, I thought it would be much kinder to brick up Monsieur Poulard's door, so as to remove from his path the temptation of making use of it. Le Poilu agreed that the idea was excellent and we set to work.

"Never in all our lives had we worked as we did then. Le Poilu mixed the mortar and brought me the bricks, and I laid them

neatly one on the other, praying the saints to make them stick before morning.

"Just in the very middle of it all Le Poilu cried:

"'Cast off! Here comes a copper!'

"Then he executed the order in case of alarm, which is to take to one's heels. I turned to run, with one hand full of bricks and the trowel in the other, but it was too late. The copper copped me:

"'What are you up to here?' said he.

"'Attending to Public Works,' I replied.

"'I'll teach you to attend to Public Works,' retorted the pitiless one. After a moment's reflection he went on: 'How do you suppose that fellow would have got out of his house to-morrow morning?'

"This, of course, was perfectly reasonable; however, I said:

"'He hardly ever goes out!"

"He seemed surprised to hear this, but followed up the argument:

"'And supposing he wants to get in?'

"I hadn't thought of that, 'tis true. Still meditating deeply, he pointed to the truck, the trowel, and the bricks, and said:

"'Where did you get those from?'

"'They're a legacy from my mother,' I replied.

"He begged me not to aggravate matters by jokes that were in the worst possible taste. Well, you know, at four o'clock in the morning one can't expect much; still one does one's best. Then he ordered me to follow him.

"When we got to the quay he went towards the *Belle-Poule*, for that is where they lock up the sailors found wandering about the streets. I protested that I was no sailor but a brave soldier with all my kit aboard the *Amiral-Charner*, which was due to start at six o'clock, and that in the urgent interest of the French Republic it was absolutely necessary for me to get back before that time.

"I quite thought he was going to relent when he whistled for a boat; but I've never met anybody as pigheaded as that fellow. I very nearly finished him off then and there by running him through the body with my bayonet. It's all very well to be arrested by some military authority, it only means eight days, but by a policeman! I knew what *that* meant on board a troopship —thirty days at the very least."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because of the disgrace. I've already told you what is understood by *esprit de corps*. A *marsouin* must never allow himself to be arrested by a civilian.

"So I got into the boat, cursing my wretched luck, when a shadowy form, brushing against me, crept up to the boatman, and pointing to me, whispered 'Marius.'

"It was Le Poilu. Good old Poilu! Marius nodded his head to show that he understood. Two sailors will always combine against a policeman, you know.

"He took up his oars and we went past the *Belle-Poule*, the convicts' cells, the ends of the jetty, and were out in the roadstead. Day was breaking and the sun just shedding his rays over the palm trees of Mourillon.

"'To the *Amiral-Charner?*' inquired Marius.

"'Yes,' replied the policeman; and, drawing out a note-book, he began to write his report.

"Marius bent down, made a rapid movement that I didn't grasp, and went on rowing, with his eyes fixed on me. I looked back at him, unable to make out what he

was after, only thinking how on earth he and Le Poilu were going to get me out of it.

"Suddenly he gave a cry:

"'*Bon Dieu de bon Dieu!*'

"'What?' cried the policeman, looking up from his notes.

"'The boat's sprung a leak!'

"It was quite true. The water was coming in, and very quickly too. It was rising higher and higher and the rubbish at the bottom was beginning to float about: bits of old net, a dead crab and an old rag.

"'Can you swim?' asked the boatman.

"The policeman couldn't swim, and I've never seen such a white face as his at that moment.

"'Row back!' he yelled, 'Row back, I tell you!'

"'We should drown before we got there,' said Marius. 'If you can't swim, can you steer?'

"He couldn't steer but he could row a bit, so he took the second pair of oars, and I took the rudder.

"'Where are we going?' I asked.

"'To the very nearest buoy, there's

one over there. *Tonnerre de Dieu*, we shan't get there in time!'

"The policeman bent double over his oars, with water up to the tops of his boots —which he removed—and perspiration streamed down his face.

"'There's the buoy! Look out! Look out!' cried Marius.

"Now, to the everlasting shame of the whole police force, I must relate that this particular member of theirs paid no attention whatsoever to either of us. He made a superhuman effort, and leaped upon the buoy, slipped and fell to his knees, and then stood upright, solitary, and white as a ghost in the middle of the sea, like a statue on its pedestal: the statue of the policeman lighting the world! Then Marius called out:

"'Hard a starboard! Quick!'

"I placed myself at the rudder again, and we departed slowly. The boat was so full of water that I could hardly steer her.

"'Let go the helm,' said Marius. 'We must bail out, and then *I'll put back the plug!*'

"He had taken out the plug and that was

why the boat had let in water. Good old Marius! Good old Poilu!"

. . . . . .

We finished up the remainder of the wine.

"That is true *esprit de corps*," said Barnavaux simply, "and when we find we've got to give a hiding to those fellows at the arsenal——"

"What happened to the policeman?" I inquired.

"Oh," said Barnavaux indifferently, "I don't know; perhaps the *préfet* sent for him, in a carriage and pair maybe!"

THE ROMANCERO

"BARNAVAUX," I said, "put on your helmet."

"Helmet?" growled Barnavaux. "What's the good of it? Where's the blooming sun. There's no sun in this damned country, and no land, and no water! Only a—a damned mixture of the lot!"

He was lying on the deck of the little puffing steamer that was taking us up the Alima, in the very heart of the Congo. He was covered with perspiration that came through his linen suit in big wet patches, and he looked like a wild beast at bay.

We all looked like wild beasts at bay as we lay there motionless, borne along in the sluggish, tedious little boat that crawled painfully on its way, belching forth from its iron lungs volumes of acrid smoke.

We had been like this for days, our bodies in a continual bath of sweat, caused by the unendurable heat of the invisible and

infernal sun. The land, but was it land? for the trees seemed to grow in the water, trees with black trunks and black foliage and roots that writhed like serpents. Was it water? or a thick greasy, ink-like mixture formed of the rot of the trees, and grasses, and beasts that had been dead for centuries.

There are countries that have well-nigh faded out of existence; there are dry and barren wildernesses; there are saharas, the skeletons of countries that once lived. But you can see these skeletons; they have decided features and you know what to make of them. There are also countries that to all intents and purposes do not exist; they have no form. Life there is gigantic yet vague. It lies low and hidden, defiled by the corruption of countless and perpetual deaths. These countries are as Adam was before God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. "A mixture of everything," Barnavaux had said. He was right. It filled one with fear to think of it.

I tried to explain to him that he must distinguish between the chemical and the luminous rays of the sun; that

the latter could not reach him, while the former——I got muddled, I knew what I wanted to say, but could find no words to express my meaning. I felt as if my brain had been turned into a number of little separate brains each of which had no connection with the other. Besides, I reflected, each man for himself, and, if Barnavaux got sunstroke, so much the worse for him.

Just at that moment, as we lay there only half-conscious, I saw something appear above the top rung of the ladder leading from the deck to the engine-room. It was a face, covered with smoke and soot, with red hair saturated with sweat, and two sea-green eyes gone mad, the pupils so distended that they seemed to swamp the whites. The head came higher, followed by a hairy, naked, muscular body, blackened with coal, and Zimmerman, the huge mechanic, stood before us, as naked as the day that he was born.

The sweat trickled down his body, leaving white channels along the blackened skin. He looked terrible, with twisted mouth and hands that shook and trembled as though he had St. Vitus's dance. Something had

gone wrong with his engine and he had been trying to put it right. It was like hell down there.

"What day is it to-day?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Saturday, the 15th of March," answered Barnavaux, adding between his teeth, "and a fine time to send us here too, just when it is hottest!"

But Zimmerman was speaking, in that strange voice that seemed to come from some one else.

"Saturday, March 15th? Then it is to-day that we're going to be blown up, to bust!"

With that he returned down the ladder.

We were on our feet in a second, and peering down the hatch. We could see him down there standing in front of his engine, moving a lever. As soon as he moved it, one of the two Senegalese stokers turned it in the opposite direction without stirring a muscle of his face. They were trying to get Zimmerman away, but respectfully, because he was a white man and their chief.

"Something gone wrong with the engines?" I asked.

"Engine he good," answered the stoker Oumar, in his clear, child-like voice.

"Well, what's the matter?"

"Engine he good," continued Oumar, tapping his head, "but chief engineer Zimmerman he no good! Chief engineer he mad!"

Zimmerman turned another lever, which Oumar reversed for the tenth time at least since we had been standing there. Then the gigantic Alsatian seized him, and with one throw sent him rolling almost under the red-hot bars of the grate. The nigger got up without a word, while Samba, the second stoker, as quietly took his place because he knew quite well what was expected of him.

But Zimmerman was grinding his teeth and looking at us with an expression I shall never forget, so full was it of appeal and despair, and agony, and yet of fury too. I can imagine that, when a dog goes mad and springs at his master's throat, he must wear that same expression. It comes from the struggle between the old instincts of devotion, loyalty, and affection, and the demoniac rage that bids him bite and kill. As I looked at him, the thought came into

my head that I might have to treat him as one treats a mad dog, and I shuddered at the thought. Barnavaux shuddered too, but put his hand on my shoulder.

"No," he implored, "he's not mad. He hasn't even got sunstroke. I've seen fellows taken like this before now. Just leave him alone, but we must change the current of his thoughts. Wait a bit."

He turned to Zimmermann and said severely:

"Zimmermann, don't you know that you are stark-naked?"

The man drew himself up like a horse when one takes the reins, and clasped his two hands over his breast as though he were at confession, with a strange and most unsoldier-like gesture. Then he took his canvas trousers and shirt from the gunwale.

"I knew it!" ejaculated Barnavaux, "I knew it! He'll never forget that he was once a Lazarist lay-brother. The first thing to be done was to remind him that he wasn't decent. Ah, the missionaries! they know how to train them I can tell you!"

Zimmermann had dipped a pail into the river and, having brought it up filled with dirty water and rotten leaves, he began to drink. I took the pail away, and gave him two brimming glasses of filtered water with a dash of tafia. He was trembling violently and looking at us with wild eyes.

"What is the matter?" said he. "What have I been doing?"

Two big tears rolled down his cheeks, not that he was conscious of any trouble, but the crisis was over and the inevitable reaction, which was dreadfully painful to witness, had set in.

"Now we've only got to see that he doesn't jump overboard," said Barnavaux. "He might try to, you know, for his blood is on fire and he'd do anything to cool it."

Turning to Zimmermann he went on calmly:

"What's the sense of getting into that state? a fellow like you, once a Lazarist lay-brother—that's almost as good as being a priest—then promoted to be storekeeper, and then engineer with a Government appointment and mentioned in the Colonial

official papers. Why were you mentioned? Tell us about it."

Zimmermann drew his hand across his forehead and a gleam of pride lit up his face. I knew by that, he was coming to himself again, for pride is the feeling which most strikingly emphasises the difference between man and beast.

"It was because of the insurrection in Carnotville, in Haute-Sangha. You know that as well as I do!"

"How should I know it?" retorted Barnavaux, who had heard the story over and over again.

"You *do* know," said Zimmermann. "Before that I was a Lazarist lay-brother, and happy with them! Yes, I was happy. I can do almost anything. It was I who built the chapel. I baked the bricks and did all the stone and woodwork. When I was at their settlement at Banghui I was chief engineer on their steamer, and it was a proper boat that! Not an old tub of a Government boat like this!

"When I wasn't acting as architect, or carpenter, or engineer, I used to teach French to the little niggers. I was a teacher,

too! and I used to wear a cassock just like a real priest. I couldn't rise higher than that, could I?

"Then one day the Government said: 'Religion? We're not going to have any more of it! All you priests can clear out!' So the Lazarists cleared.

"I went to Father Mottu and asked him: 'What's to become of me? I can't go back to France, I don't know anyone there now, and this is my country. In France there are nothing but white people, and how can one live in a country where every one is white? It's unnatural! All he answered was: 'You can go where you like, but we can't keep you.'

"So I took service in the Administration, and they made me storekeeper at Carnotville. That was how it happened.

"To all intents and purposes, I was alone there. The chief was a young fellow from the *Ecole coloniale*, a nice, harmless sort of kid, who knew all that was unpractical and nothing that was useful about his profession.

"They are always doing that sort of thing in Paris! Sending babes over to uncivilised countries half the size of France

and making them generals or judges—quasi kings.

"In this case, fortunately, Haute-Sangha was peaceful enough. The natives of Carnotville—Yanghérés—cultivated patches of ground in the forest and planted bananas there. They also bred goats and dogs—they eat dogs, by the way—and paid their taxes in india-rubber. In fact they did all they were told to do.

"Near that station was another village inhabited by the Haoussas, men of a totally different race and of a far greater wealth and cunning. They hardly condescended to cultivate their fields of millet and their banana trees. They were merchants, and regular Jews at that.

"One day a Haoussa came to the Yanghéré village and bought a fowl from one of the women, giving her a hundred white beads in payment. When Mamy Coumba, the woman's husband, came home, he asked where the fowl had gone, and then flew into a terrible rage, because, he said, a hundred beads was not sufficient."

Barnavaux whistled. "That fellow was a cad," he said. "In the Yangheré country the fowls don't belong to the men, but to

the women. So this woman had the right to sell her poultry when, and where, and how she liked."

"That's right enough," said Zimmermann, "but this particular man was a beast, and the proof of that is that he went straight off after the Haoussa and killed him. That night the guardhouse was bombarded. All the Haoussas had armed themselves, and were vowing vengeance. So war was declared, not against us, but between the Haoussas and Yanghérés."

"Under the scandalised eyes of the representative of the French Republic, and in the very shadow of the tricolour, symbol of peace and civilisation," remarked Barnavaux. "We've heard that sort of rot before."

"That was what my young man from the *Ecole coloniale* said," went on Zimmermann. "But he did not say it like you, he meant it, because he was an earnest little fellow, and besides he had read a lot of books on the subject.

"'I can't allow this,' he said, 'the flag has been insulted and the guardhouse attacked. We must give the Haoussas a severe lesson.'

"He said a severe lesson, because it is what the papers say when, in the name of civilisation, a company of Senegalese soldiers destroy some tiny native village.

"It would have been a very easy matter to destroy the Haoussa village, but then who would have paid the taxes? I said to the Boy, 'It will all settle down very soon, *monsieur l'administrateur'!* That pacified him for the time being, but the next day he had altered his mind.

"'It's my business to make these people respect Justice as well as the Government,' he said, 'in fact the latest instructions lay great stress upon this very point. Now, the Haoussas are in the right, for Mamy Coumba has killed a man. He must be put in prison and the case dealt with according to the rules of the Penal Code.'

"Of course he would have been quite right if all this had taken place somewhere in France. But if he had brought the Penal Code into force at Carnotville, we should have had all the Yanghérés on the warpath for years at a stretch, and what would the authorities at home say to that? They don't object to having colonies, but they dislike being disturbed by them."

"Revolt in Haute-Sangha!" began Barnavaux in a sing-song voice as though he were reading a paper; "Atrocious crimes of an Administrator!"

"I didn't want the Boy to be worried, for I was very fond of him," went on Zimmermann. "I liked him almost as much as I had liked poor Father Mottu, and whenever he got a bit depressed I always told him that things would simmer down. Besides, each time I persuaded him it meant another day to the good. But at last the Boy fairly wept with rage and humiliation. 'Things are no better,' he cried. 'We are utterly dishonoured!'

"I knew it would be all right, for the rainy season was due, and it has a calming effect even upon the niggers!

"After twenty days and nights of ceaseless rain the only man left to kick up a disturbance outside the guardhouse was Samara, the father of Ali, the murdered Haoussa. However, he made noise enough! He told us of the wound in his son's dead body, of his burial-place, and of the spirit of the dead man which hovered over the grave. On the twenty-first night I went out to him with my two hands in my pockets,

to show that my intentions were of the best.

"'Samara,' I said, 'has not Mamy Coumba who killed your son got a daughter?'

"He grunted a deep 'Ugh!' just as they always do when they understand what is being said.

"I said no more, but went to Mamy Coumba. 'Have you not a daughter, a virgin, to give Samara in exchange for his son whom you killed?'

"'No,' he replied.

"'Mamy Coumba,' said I, 'you have a daughter? Come, I know that well enough!'

"He shook his head, but his wife broke in:

"'It's not fair! It's not fair! We've only killed one man, and my daughter may bear several men-children!'

"'Yes,' I answered, 'but supposing she comes back to you when she has born you some only one, to Ali's father?'

"'Oh, very well!' said Mamy Coumba, after a moment's consideration, 'if Samara agrees, I'm quite willing!'

"I went back to Samara and explained matters to him.

"'It's not enough! It's quite fair to

send back the girl when she's given me a son, but Mamy Coumba has got to return the fowl as well!'

"That's how I settled the great quarrel between the Yanghérés and the Haoussas. The Boy was a prey to certain scruples and thought my methods out of order. But when the Governor came and heard the report he said, that for an ex-priest, I was a very knowing fellow, that my name should be honourably mentioned in the *Journal officiel*, and that I should also receive a gift of fifty francs."

"Ah," I said, "I've heard that story before, Zimmerman. You didn't invent it, but it's very ancient history. It happened when the Spaniard, Ruy Diaz de Bivar, also known as the Cid Campeador, killed the father of a girl called Chimene. For he married the girl afterwards, saying, 'I've killed one man belonging to you: I give you another in exchange!'"

"I can't help it if my story is like yours," said Zimmerman, colouring. "I didn't copy anything! What I've told you happened in Haute-Sangha, not in Spain."

"Besides," said Barnavaux, "there is no fowl in the story of the Cid, is there?"

THE DEAD SHIP

"THEY won't be able to pass Pelée," said Barnavaux to me, "the tide is going out."

The poor little fishing-boat, with its crew of five or six men, was in the thick of a terrible squall blowing from the N.E. She had not been able to sail up the wind and get into the channel, and was now trying to get between the island of Pelée and the mainland and make for the port of Cherbourg.

"She might just as well try to sail along a high road," roared Barnavaux, above the wind, "the water's too low!" After a moment he exclaimed: "They've done it, *nom de Dieu!* they've run aground!"

The boat had suddenly run aground, and the wind, beating on the powerless brown sails, was tearing them bodily away and hurling them through the grey, rain-sodden sky. The torn fragments seemed to flutter hither and thither for quite a long

time—a whole minute perhaps, and that is a long time—before falling into the sea.

"There's a man overboard," I exclaimed, with a heavy heart.

"He's got hold of the broken mast," went on Barnavaux, "the others are still on deck, but the boat will be dashed to pieces in less than half an hour. And then——"

He did not finish his sentence. At one word of command the life-boat near the signal mast had been launched. It was already out to sea with its six men and the pilot. We could see their big brown hands, stung by the salt spray, grasping the oars, and their bent backs under their yellow-green oilskins. The boat swung along so evenly that it looked almost easy, and as though any one could have done it. I began to shout and yell with enthusiasm and hope; with pride too, for, when one sees other men exerting all their strength and all their courage, one feels proud with an indescribable pride, as though one had some share in the brave deed.

"What do you think of that?" said Barnavaux. "That was a neat piece of

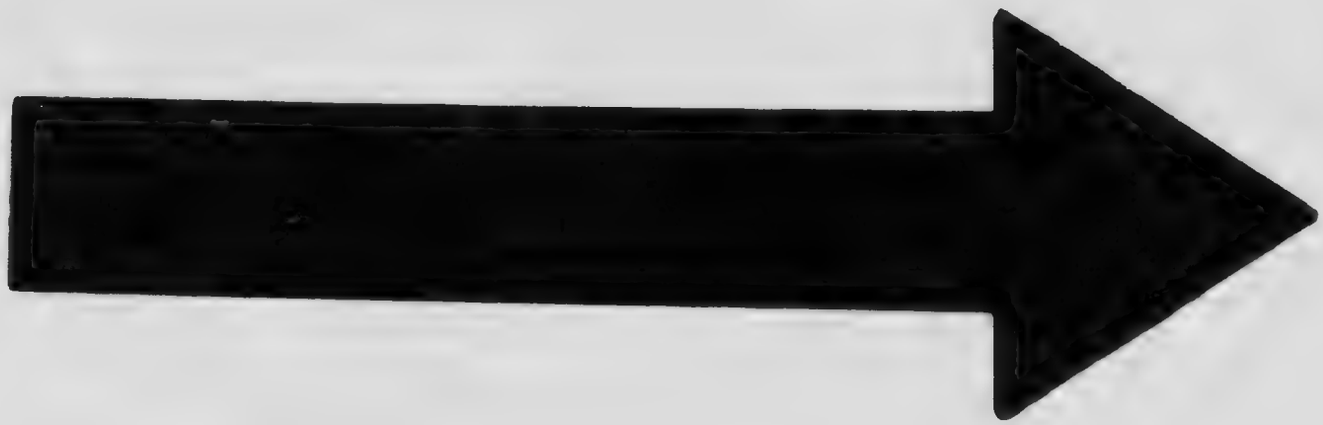
work if you like! They didn't take two minutes to launch the boat."

It is quite true that the cleverest and trickiest part in the launching of a life-boat is to loosen all the moorings uniformly and simultaneously as quickly as possible, but carefully, so that the boat takes the water well. However, I could think of nothing but the brave, graceful little craft as she made her way across the sea, over the huge, flat-surfaced waves that looked as though the wind had first raised, then crushed them. She made me think of a water-fly paddling over the surface of a pond and making straight for its desired goal. The oars hardly seemed to penetrate the angry waves, and presently they stopped altogether, while the man who had fallen over was pulled aboard.

A second or two later she again hauled to, to allow the crew of the fishing-smack to board her. Saved! They were saved!

The life-boat veered and made for Cherbourg. I clapped my hands and Barnavaux' bright eyes sparkled with joy. He is a simple soul, and all he found to say was:

"Well, after that, we must go and have a drink at the *Caveau des Dessalés* on the



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quay, and when the crew go by we'll call them in. It's really worth it!"

. . . . . .

Having swallowed a brimming glass of hot *calvados*, spiced with cloves and lemon, Barnavaux remarked:

"I saw some other fellows saved once, but they looked just like ghosts!

"I remember. It's more than ten years since, but I remember it quite well. I had just been dismissed as convalescent from the hospital at Mévatanane in Madagascar and sent down to Majunga. They didn't know what to do with me, so they put me with Plévech, who was no more of a sailor than me, for he worked at the Customs, but he had been commissioned to keep a look-out between Béravinc and Maintirane for contraband powder.

"The Hindu merchants and Zanzibar Arabs come enormous distances to sell powder to the Sakalaves, 'tis true, but still I can't for the life of me see how Plévech could have stopped them with his rotten little boat and his four native sailors recruited at Majunga. As far as I was concerned, I represented the marine infantry, the landing forces, and the whole

armed force at that! I was more than sufficient, for we never caught sight of the enemy. But this arrangement was the idea of the people in authority, and of course no one ever questions the wisdom of that.

"Ah, we were a green pair of sailors! There was a head wind the whole time owing to the season of the year. We both knew in a vague kind of way that there was a thing called "tacking," and we knew that it helped to get a boat along even against a head wind. Our Sakalave sailors didn't know much more than we did, besides, they always let us manage things out of respect for the sacred vagaries of the white man.

"Anyway, off we went. We tacked right and left, haphazard-like, to see what would happen. Nothing much happened. Sometimes the wind puffed out the sails and then let them go slack again, which made me think of a woman puffing out her dress.

"The boat went slowly; she veered, came back, passed the same places again and again, crossed her own track, and described figures of eight. We always kept close to the coast for fear of losing our-

selves. We used to weigh anchor every night and feed and sleep on the boat, close to land though—I used to call it '*coucher à l'étape*'—and very often we would find that we had gone backwards instead of ahead.

"Then the Sakalaves would call us *machicoures*, which in their language means farmers, a great insult to a real sailor, I imagine. But we were not sailors, and the insult left us untouched.

"Ah, those days! those first days! They were the happiest of my life. I used to wake at dawn to enjoy more of them, and even now I can see the gorgeous morning sky. It was a deep orange; the lantern at the boat's head still alight, but pale against the brilliant dawn, and behind us our black Sakalave pilot, with one hand on the wheel, oblivious to everything.

"There were coral reefs everywhere, and between them and the coast large lakes or channels of still water. These coral reefs looked exactly like banks along a railway line, broken here and there, and forming ways through which the sea could enter. Generally, however, they were unbroken and of an almost uniform height. The

roar of the waves breaking beneath kept us company and prevented us from feeling lonely, and yet at the same time made everything seem unreal.

"On the other side of the lagoons was the mainland, which, in the distance, looked like a broad, flat piece of ribbon. Great trees, covered with blue, mauve and yellow flowers, towered up against the sky, and below them were what looked like holes or caves, cool and pleasing to the eye, carved out of the green mass of vegetation. Oh, well, I can't explain what it really looked like: word-stringing is not in my line.

"And there wasn't a human being anywhere, nothing but rats, crabs, flowers, birds and bees, and the birds screeched for fun, not from fear.

"But if you could have seen the water of the lagoons! It was so transparent that although fifteen or twenty metres deep you could see the bottom quite plainly, all planted and branched and leafed with violet, green, and pink coral-trees, and full of fishes leaping and dancing, and playing in the water that was almost as clear and light as air.

"The fishes were multi-coloured, striped and spotted, big and little, some covered with prickles, some that looked like humming birds, and others with parrot beaks. Right at the bottom, huge oysters opened out, displaying the bright, variegated mother-of-pearl inside their shells; there were blue mussels, crinkled shells of every description, and little pink corals.

"There were fierce fishes too that hunted the others. I remember one night I was awakened by hearing the Malagasy for 'shark,' and in the light of the moon I saw one of our sailors with fierce-set jaw bending over the gunwale with a trident in his hand.

"There were none of these lagoons in some places, and there the coast was practically bare of vegetation. That may have been owing to the strong, destructive winds blowing in from the open sea, or possibly because there were no rivers. In parts like that, there was nothing beautiful, nothing but a few miserable palm trees that looked like worn-out brooms. When we came to such a spot Plévech and I would laugh and joke at the scenery. We weren't mad, nor drunk; it was the pure joy of life and freedom, and

the certainty of coming soon to other earthly paradises, natural aquariums and cageless aviaries.

"The only thing we couldn't make out was that our Sakalaves seemed much more satisfied when there were no corals, nor lagoons, nor aquariums, nor earthly paradises. It was not that they were afraid of running aground either, there was water enough and to spare. Our first conclusion was that they were fools. A fool, you know, is primarily a person whom one does not understand!

"Then Rainebouze, the one that knew most French, explained that only wicked people came to the reefs: wizards, *matatouas*, or wandering souls, and *kinoulys*, horrible ghouls that devour human beings, and are themselves covered with rotting flesh.

"This convinced me more than ever that they really were fools, and one morning to give them a fright I dressed up as a *matatoua* in an old sail. But Plévech didn't like it. He told me after that his father and mother believed in all kinds of spirits, and he disliked people to make fun of these things.

"He also believed it was unlucky, but he didn't say so.

"On the evening of that same day we cast anchor in a channel leading to one of the lagoons. We had hardly spoken a word all day, and it was very hot, I remember. We were tired and didn't talk, even our glass of absinth before dinner did not relieve the general gloom. Then, suddenly and unaccountably, we felt our spirits rise in a weird, extraordinary, almost terrifying fashion. Have you ever noticed after smoking opium how your body seems to become light? It hardly seems to exist. Well, the feeling we had was ever so much stranger than that.

"'Are we on a mountain top?' asked Plévech. 'The air is so light I feel as if I were 2,000 feet above the sea, and do you notice how cool it is?'

"'Yes,' I answered, 'it is cool. But I can smell home, I can smell France.'

"Yes," said he, "it smells as it does at home in summer after a good storm of rain. What can it be? What can it be? And, look, those black devils are frightened of something!"

"Yes, they were frightened. They were

looking at the water that had suddenly turned dark green. There are some people whose eyes darken when they get angry, well, it was just like that. They looked at the sky too, a cloudless, windless sky, but of a strange copper colour towards the west, something like a badly-scoured saucepan, dirty yet shining.

"It is more than cool now!" I remarked to Plévech. "I'm absolutely freezing!"

"Yes, in the middle of the Mozambique canal we were suddenly smitten with icy cold! Just as Plévech was about to reply, he was nearly knocked over by our four Sakalaves, who fell upon the sails and lowered them, leaving the boat empty and bare. At the same moment we heard the cries of a flock of sea-gulls making for the land, and then what sounded like a great wail coming from the sky. It was the wind whipping up the sea.

"It had come suddenly, more quickly than an express train, and the ocean was screaming under its lash, keeping up an incessant moaning the while. On the other side of the reef the waves rose and fell like houses in an earthquake. I understood what it was: it was the cyclone,

the awful cyclone of the Indian Ocean that sometimes carries ships right inland on the crest of a wave. My idea was to jump overboard and try to reach the reef.

"'What's the use?" said Plévech, 'the waves will go right over it. We had much better stay where we are; besides, we are as safe as though we were in port anchored near the quay.'

"Although the Sakalaves could swim like fish, they seemed to be of his opinion. They lay in the bottom of the boat, motionless, but Rainebouze, who could speak a little French, raised his head and said:

"'It is the night of the dead! They come back to earth!' At this Plévech, who had not been inside a church since his first communion, and who only read the pamphlets issued by the Confédération Générale du Travail, solemnly crossed himself.

"Rainebouze didn't make the sign of the cross, but he took from one of the lockers a fowl with its feet tied together, struck off its head with one blow, and let the blood flow into the sea. Plévech nodded his head, and, dipping his fingers in the blood, made signs with it on his bare chest. He had

turned into a wild man again and was at least 4,000 years younger than he had been but a few moments before.

"Our boat was perched in a corner of the channel like a sparrow nestling between roof and chimney. She was so small, fortunately, that the cyclone passed right over her head. A larger ship would have been lost, for the blast of this tempest did not blow straight ahead. The air was vibrating like a sling and the water revolving as rapidly as if it had been the sling-stone. Now and then you could see the bottom, and the furious waves tearing up shells and great pieces from the rocks and coral trees.

"Then just as it had risen, the wind died down and the air became horribly, supernaturally still, while the huge waves continued to rage and foam.

"'How light it is!' I said.

"We were in the middle of a frightful black pit made of whirling clouds, but above them the sky had grown extraordinarily clear and blue, while stars, never seen by the naked eye of man, appeared. I was told afterwards that this always happens in the middle of a cyclone. And these great

mocking stars lighted up the raging water. At that moment I heard the voice of Rainebouze:

"'The *matatouas*! There is the great *lakane*[1] of the *matatouas*,' and he lay down again and hid his face.

"And I saw the great ship of the *matatouas*!

"Perhaps you will not believe that ships can come up from the deepest depths of the ocean, unless, of course, they happen to be submarines; but that night I saw a great ship come up from the bottom of the sea and float. A great ship, mastless, save for a broken stump at her stern, which was higher than the rest of her, and built like a house. She was chockful of coral and rock, covered with seaweed that clung and twisted like woodbine and huge shells that looked like a coat of mail.

"She was peopled, yes, peopled with enormous crabs, furious at being disturbed, with flat fish that leaped and bounded into the sea, and with horrible writhing worms, pink and white and as long as my arm; and then the *matatouas*.

"The vessel was a three-master, wrecked

[1] Ship.

maybe some three hundred years ago, and miraculously brought to the surface again. In her sides were huge holes through which poured torrents of the dirty water that lay hidden inside her, and through these torrents we saw a skeleton with chains fastened round its shinbones come tumbling down, hover for a moment on the brink, and then fall headlong into the sea. It was followed by another, and another, and another: a whole avalanche of skeletons and rusty chains. Now and then one of the great crabs would slide into the water too, and all the time the three-master came heavily towards the reef, pitching like an overladen cart.

"Every wave that dashed against her sent the water that filled her crashing against the crumbling sides, great pieces of which fell into the sea to be followed by more skeletons and more chains. And she rolled steadily onwards towards the reef, *towards us!*

"Her keel struck violently against the rock, freed itself, and struck again with a noise that made the reef echo like a deep and hollow bell. Then she sank so quickly that she made me think of some one falling

suddenly to their knees. Her forepart crumbled away into a writhing mass of horrors, and was quickly ground to nothing by the seething waves. Her stern remained longer afloat, showing in the clear light cabins that reminded me of the plans of houses that you sometimes see in the papers, of rooms on the fifth storey, furnished and inhabited.

"Furnished, did I say? We saw old cannons encrusted with coral, long-shaped boxes that might have been beds and some things made of rusty metal, the captain's navigating instruments no doubt.

"And the people? I saw a man whose bones had been crushed by a falling beam; and there were the great worms, moving, writhing, crawling, twisting their sightless heads hither and thither, then disappearing once more into the black water.

"How long did it last, do you say? I don't know. It may only have lasted a few minutes. After the horrible calm the wind had risen again, and all that remained of the phantom ship—of this supernatural, rock-lined, seaweed-coated vessel, long since

foundered and yet afloat, alive yet dead —quickly fell to pieces.

"But the sea brought her figure-head to us, the figure-head she had borne in the days when she was a real boat and not a horrible ghost. I think it must have been a heathen goddess, or some saint perhaps, but you couldn't tell. Storm and old age had carried off the lower part of her body. Worms had eaten her skull, her breasts were gnawed away, and there was a great hole in her neck. By some strange freak of chance her nose remained whole, while her eyes had fallen in. And that was all that was left of her. She looked like an owl, not a woman, and I could not but think that time worked upon statues as upon women, making them both hideous to look upon.

"But Plévech, who was half crazy with fear, swore that he had seen things that looked just like the figure-head in the old grottos and graveyards in his part of France. Rainebouze observed that in his country they were put by the wizards inside the tombs.

"All that Plévech could say was: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and

of the Holy Ghost!' and Rainebouze, who had been to the church at Majunga, responded with a devout 'Amen'! The next moment, however, he gathered some grains together to make a *sikidy*, or charm, and killed another fowl. Plévech did everything that Rainebouze did, because he feared lest the religion of the latter should be more appropriate to the occasion, and the Christian religion of no avail against the evil spirits.

"I dared not even think. Only three days later, when the storm had quite abated, did I ask Rainebouze what the ship of the *matatouas* really was.

"Rainebouze looked solemnly at me and answered with pride:

"'Slaves! slaves! full of slaves in the big ship. For Bourbon. Tied with chains and stolen at Madasgacar by the white men. But Madasgacar would not give them up, and their spirits at last rose from the sea and brought their bones back to their own country!"

I understood. It was a slave ship that had stolen these Malagasies three hundred years ago. It had been overtaken by a cyclone, and the poor devils, with their feet in irons, had been drowned like rats

in a cage. Three hundred years later their skeletons had returned to the land where their children and their forbears slept.

"But how did the three-master come up again?" I asked.

"How can I say?" answered Barnavaux, with indifference. "The great whirlpool had dragged it up from the bottom, and then there were the gases too, accumulated in the hold. Well, I don't know, but I saw it with my own eyes, that's all I can say about it!"

At this moment the life-boat men slouched by, quite calm, but with that supernaturally clear look that comes to the eyes of those who have fought against great perils and won the victory.

Barnavaux called to them to come and have a drink. After thanking us, they came in and sat down, and I told them Barnavaux' story.

"I can't vouch for the truth of that," said the pilot, "but, when I was on the *Epervier* at Santiago, I saw in the Pacific a schooner that had been wrecked for hundreds of years rise one stormy night to the surface. It was captured and put in a

kind of museum. There are strange things happen on the sea, strange beyond belief!"

. . . . . .

And I did not contradict him, for had I not met at Zeilah the man who saw the Sirens?

THE MAN WHO SAW THE SIRENS

I KNOW a man who once lived with the sirens. He lives at Zeilah now. He buys coffee from the caravans that come from Abyssinia, giving them in exchange old Marie-Thérèse thalers, cartridges, empty cartridge cases, and quick-firing guns destined for killing Europeans. But years ago he was lighthouse-keeper on the Farsan Islands in the Red Sea, and that is how he came to see the sirens.

He is not mad; I am quite sure he is not, but he cannot speak French very well now, because his trade compels him to converse all the time with the natives in Arabic, Galla or in the dialect of Amharic, which is the language of the mountaineers, the true Abyssinians. Then, when he consents to relate his wonderful adventures, he so often interrupts himself and for such long intervals that people usually haven't patience to wait and listen to the end. I can't think what makes him stop in this way.

It may be that he *sees* the sirens in his

mind's eye, and for many other reasons. Perhaps because, when he was with them, he did nothing day after day but sleep and dream away the time, lying on the rocks or in the warm pools, and, although he can still feel the happiness and delight of those days, yet he finds nothing to say about them, because they were empty, absolutely empty, while his heart was full.

Perhaps out of an innate delicacy there are things he wishes to keep secret, or he may be afraid that no one will believe him.

Perhaps, too, he is suspicious and jealously afraid of others going where he went. At all events I am going to try and remember his story, but you will not have before you, as I had, his bright, unfathomable eyes, sparkling with unshed tears, eyes that made me think of the deep ocean on which he swears that he swam and floated for months together.

"You can't imagine what it is like to be a lighthouse-keeper on the Farsan Islands," he began. "I've never known such a badly-constructed sea as the Red Sea. At first it appears to be only a snare and a delusion. In the middle of it there is just

one deep, narrow channel which is navigable. All the rest is crammed with coral-reefs and extinct volcanoes, right in the very middle of the track, the only use of which is to serve as a guide to the sailors. The great ships make straight for these volcanoes like moths attracted by a street lamp, the street lamp in this case being the lighthouse beacon. The sailors call this 'reconnoitring.' And one after another the ships come along, their twin-screws deep in the sun-bathed waters that swarm with living creatures, with jellyfish and starfish covered with a lace-like armour of sharp stones and tiny seaweed. But when day dawns and they see the barren rocks, or at night when the dry wind from the desert blows without ceasing, and they see the lights, they swing round in the other direction and go away as much as to say: 'Oh, it's you, is it? Now we know we're on the right track, but you're anything but pretty to look at! Good night!' Such is the ingratitude of these mechanical monsters!

"At the best of times it is never what you might call amusing to be a lighthouse-keeper. But if there are lighthouse beacons in Hell, tended by the damned, the latter

are certainly not more to be pitied than the poor devils who keep the lights going in the Red Sea.

"Every month a tank steamer used to come over, bringing me water and provisions, and when they landed I used to laugh like a maniac.

"'Men!' I used to say, 'Men! See what curious creatures they are!'

"Then they would go away again, and I was left alone with my messmate, a Danakil, who didn't know a word of my language.

"There wasn't a single blade of grass or scrap of moss on the island, nothing but dried-up ashes and pumice stone, with veins of green and red lava running through. The ground, which sounded hollow to the tread, was so hot that once or twice I said to the skipper of the tank steamer: 'What'll happen if the volcano wakes up again?'

"'It's only the sun, you fool, blazing on the pebbles,' he replied. But the Danakil standing by made hideous grimaces to change the subject. All Danakils know quite well that talking about things sometimes makes them come to pass, and he was afraid of the volcano.

One evening, just after the steamer had left, I became conscious of an unexpected yet familiar smell, the smell of chloride of lime, which grips you by the throat, and is always so noticeable in the big laundries. Then I began to dream. I could see the high tubs full of washing and the women bending over them, their bosoms glistening with perspiration under their loose blouses. It amused me to picture it all.

"The Danakil, who was on duty, came up to me with a look of terror and seized my hand. I opened the little window of my room and the same odour of chloride of lime rushed in so strong as almost to knock me backwards. The whole island was in a haze, columns of the poisonous vapour rising from the earth by hundreds. Up they rose, in gusts, in puffs, in little spurts like the thin streak of smoke from a lighted cigarette, or in enormous volleys like those that pour from the funnels of a steamer.

"I flew down the stairs, stark-naked because of the terrific heat, intending to make for one of the smoke fissures, but the Danakil shook his head and cried :

"'The water! the boiling water! It is eating up the land!'

"I put my foot to the ground and took it up again sharply. The strong-smelling, subterranean springs, boiling, and charged with every kind of chemical poison, were literally melting the island into great pools of stinking mud, great blocks of rock that detached themselves from the crumbling cliffs, and gas bubbles which, like filthy abcesses in this filthy land, burst with a soft '*floc*!'

"And the lighthouse, attacked at its very foundations, began to sway like a falling tree. It could no more stand upright than a match in a pot of melted pitch. 'To the sea!' I yelled to the Danakil, 'to the sea!'

"My feet were scorching in the mire that burned, even as it decomposed, and I felt the sting of flames upon my body, *black* flames, for I never saw one spark of light.

"At last, however, I reached the sea, the welcoming sea, the calm, cool, gracious water, and it took me in its arms. What happened to the Danakil? I never saw him again.

"When I came to my senses, I saw the

sirens. I was on another island further to the south, to which, no doubt when I was unconscious, they had carried me. My head was out of the water, resting on a pile of seaweed, and at the sight of a number of enormous creatures all brown and shining with water, I felt a great fear, for I took them at first to be sea-lions or sea-cows, and thought the tide had thrown me haphazard on one of their islands.

"I stretched out my arm, and at the slight movement I saw, bending over me, a head like a human being's, with very long, black hair parted in the middle, and two eyes more tender than those of the most loving woman speaking to me. Yes, speaking to me, I must make myself clear on that point: all the time I lived with the sirens I always understood their thoughts by the silent language that spoke not only from their eloquent eyes but, through some subtle emanation, from their whole body.

"They understood me also, but not so well, for there was a certain amount of logic in all my thoughts, and they knew nothing of logic. They only *felt*, and their feelings were as many and varied as my

logic. I speak of them in the feminine gender, just as one does of swallows, gulls or gazelles. They are, however, of both sexes and reproduce their species like other races.

"The first one to approach me was a female, and as in my semi-consciousness I thought to myself, 'I am alive! alive! Are they going to kill me just as I have begun to live again?' I suddenly understood that the creature bending over me—brute or phantom, or some strange being, part beast, part human?—was saying: 'Don't be afraid, you are with us!'

"I felt her breath on my forehead and the way she pressed her body with its soft woman-like breasts against me. It was only later I saw that my little friend had stumps ending in fins instead of arms, and two similar stumps instead of legs.

"She was happiest and most alert when in the water, where I could see her back bobbing up and down like that of a horse in a field of tall grass.

"I was a far greater source of wonder to the sirens than they were to me. They were much amused at my reluctance to

feed on the fishes they brought me and at my preference for shell-fish which were just as raw as the others. My refusal to drink sea-water seemed to upset them. However, they took me to a spring of fresh water that fell from the cliffs and, when I made a cup with my hands and drank from it, they were filled with admiration, for to them my hands always appeared wonderful.

"I used to make them necklaces of shells and coral and mother-of-pearl, and wreaths of golden seaweed, which the huge males with their whiskered faces, scarred bodies, and warlike appearance, wore as proudly as did their women-kind. Later, when they were all decked, they would sometimes give a ball in my honour. Ah, I can see them now, with their smooth backs, their long, rough hair, and the full throats of the females, as they proudly reared their heads.

"I can see their bodies bounding in the deep water. Sometimes they would whirl me away with them and in my terror I would shriek aloud, but they carried me as though I were a child, so gently and carefully that, in spite of their rapid progress, I experienced

nothing but a keen pleasure, a dizzy and voluptuous delight.

"Then one evening they sang.

"Until that evening I had only understood their mute language, the language of which I have already spoken. Their songs were without words too, but they said far more than human speech. I am not speaking metaphorically either. I knew what they were singing as plainly as if it had all been written on paper before me.

"They sang, I say: long drawn, harmonious notes of sorrow, sad and sweet when voiced by the women-sirens, solemn and full of a dark despair when chanted by the males. They sang the antiquity of their race and its downfall.

"In the first days of creation, in the days when the sea covered the whole of the earth, they made their appearance. The sirens were Nature's first effort to produce in the midst of the boundless waste of waters creatures that should not belong to the brute creation alone, but should also be possessed of brain and heart.

"Then the earth rose from out the waters and Nature turned her attention to other things and forgot them. But she left them

as they were, imperfect; she left them to their subsequent degradation, and the sirens have the bitter consciousness of their ruined greatness and their fall.

"We human beings must always suffer from our lack of likeness to the God of whom we have made an image in our hearts. The sirens suffer from their resemblance to human beings, and from their lack of human intelligence and knowledge.

"They should have reigned over the seas as men reign over the fields and woods and mountains. Nature forgot to bring them to perfection, and very soon the sharks will have devoured the last of them.

"That is why in former days they used to follow in the wake of vessels and drown the sailors drugged by their charms: jealousy prompted them.

"But the race is fast dying out. There are only a few tribes remaining in the Red Sea, and on the other side of the world near the Malay Archipelago. Far from drowning me, the sirens had saved my life that they might enjoy the melancholy pleasure of seeing a man, one of those beings to whom chance or some mysterious fate had given the mastery, even though he impressed

upon them the humiliation and agony of defeat.

"And thus the race of the sirens accomplishes its fatal destiny, remaining gentle, and kind, and full of strength, which is, however, impotent to struggle against the monsters of the deep.

"They have a far keener sense of beauty than man, the beauty of sky and air and water. They have a keener consciousness of the mysterious ebb and flow of blood in the veins, and of the pulsing life that fills them. But, beyond that, they are only animals.

"And that brings me to something else. Being mere animals the male and female sirens lived together in childlike chastity, except during the mating season. They lived together in friendly couples, playing, fishing, diving down to the bed of the ocean to look at the sea-gardens filled with bright shells, with anemones, alive and flowerlike, and with fishes skimming past the floating strands of seaweed. Their instinct brought them together in the closest of friendly communions.

"My siren friend had adopted me in this way, and when, with one hand resting on

her shoulder, she carried me with her through the waves, I felt a pure happiness such as I have never experienced with any woman. Her body quivered under my touch, but when I asked more of her she did not understand me.

"I did not realise what would happen when the mating season came round, and I consoled myself by thinking that she would love me then with a human love

"I was wrong. When the great season arrived, the friendly couples parted company. I cannot bear to think of it, it fills me with horror, with horror because of the suffering it caused me.

"When filled with the frenzy of desire, the women sirens turned into mere animals, the males into bellowing brutes. They made no choice; each was for all, and all for each. I saw them meet and embrace in the foam; and I saw the brown eyes whose beauty and tenderness I so loved turn away from me.

"Afterwards she would swim towards me. 'What is the matter?' she would say. 'Leave me!' I replied. Then, with all her wondering body and with all her

senses, she asked me the reason for my hatred of her. She told me that all the males were necessary to her, one for his strength, another for his prudence, and all the young ones for their courage and their prowess. It had to be so! I went away among the rocks and hid my face in my hands.

"'Ah,' she said to me at last, weeping as she spoke, 'you are a man and I am a siren. You wanted all of me and I could not belong to anyone. You wanted me for yourself, and I do not belong to myself but to the God of my race. We were wrong to keep you with us. But, oh, my friend, put your hand once more upon my shoulder!'

"I did as she asked me, and once again we darted through the waters more rapidly than we had ever done before. We swam for the whole of one night and half the next day, and at last we came to a flat shore beneath a mountain over which eagles were flying.

"'Here,' said she, 'you will find men like yourself, and women such as you desire. Good-bye!'

"But before she went she taught me the love of a siren. Yes, I have known

it! The sand was warm and the blue of the sky filled my eyes. I still have the salt taste of her lips on mine. I shall always have it. Perhaps one day she will return to me, or I shall go to her."

And such was the adventure related to me by Elias Whitney, who to-day purchases coffee from the caravans.

THE ATTACK ON THE KSAR

IT was a little, low building with no ventilation save for two long, narrow loopholes; the walls were very thick and roughly built and the door was propped up by old railway lines placed haphazard across it. But, under a shocking stream of blasphemy, which proceeded from the interior, door, roof, bolts and even the very walls themselves seemed to tremble as a kettle lid trembles on a raging fire.

It had long been the hour of the siesta, but not a soul in the station could close an eye. The men, *joyeux*[1] from the African battalions and soldiers of the Legion, were sulkily or amusedly listening with all their ears, while even the yellow faces of the Arab Goumiers creased into a thousand wrinkles whenever they caught a familiar or particularly choice expression. The officers, who were in full dress because

[1] Slang name given to the soldiers of the African Disciplinary Battalions.

a General was expected to inspect the men, merely shrugged their shoulders and retired to their own quarters that the prestige of their uniform might not be sullied by what they heard.

Even the very camels, kneeling in the great grey-walled courtyards, were troubled in their sleep and groaned as though their packs were being changed. From the depths of the desert the wind reached us in slow, burning gusts. Low and sullen against the horizon a great motionless dune of reddish sand shone with a dazzling light in the over-charged atmosphere.

Barnavaux crept quietly to the door of the prison.

"What is the matter?" I said.

"Oh, nothing," he replied; "only Chavarot, the *joyeux*, giving us a piece of his mind."

He seized a moment's silence to inquire: "What's the matter, La Victoire?"

The voice of Chavarot was once more borne upon the air as he roared:

"I'm thirsty! but it's not that. Where's that General?" Here he gave an utterly false and entirely unprintable definition of his superior officer. "Where's

the ould el gahbâ ? He's got to come and talk to me ! "

" He's not turned up yet," said Barnavaux, in a conciliatory tone ; " but I'm sure he will look upon it as a pleasure to call upon you in your mansion here ; and he'll give you thirty days for your pains. You've got a nerve and no mistake ! "

" Even if he didn't come," said Chavarot more quietly, " I'd get it all the same, I know, by post. But I've got a word or two I want to say to him."

" You'll see him all right," repeated Barnavaux, " but he's not arrived yet, honour bright ! Couldn't you shut up a bit and leave the rest of us a moment's peace ? "

A dead silence reigned in the building.

" What's he done ? " I asked.

" Him ? " said Barnavaux. " Oh, nothing ! got drunk of course, said the soup was cold, and threw his pannikin at the cook's head. It's a funny thing, but the soup always *is* cold in these hot countries. Then he hammered the four who came to lock him up : ' thirteen months' cells for assault and battery.' He's a great pal of the Ornano boulevard ladies, a thorough-going Apache ! "

He mused a minute, then added:

"I'd like to know what he's got to say to the General. La Victoire's a boy who is very proud of himself."

. . . . . .

The General did not arrive until about five o'clock in the evening, so Barnavaux had time to explain why Chavarot had such a good opinion of himself.

"I'll tell you all about it," said he. "It was two years ago during the great expedition of Tademait. We were told that the expedition was absolutely necessary, and I, for one, firmly believe that it was. So long as there are fellows in the desert who lie in wait for some harmless, unprotected man, and then kill him in the approved fashion of ripping him open and filling up his body with all sorts of horrors, it's my belief that all the other circumcised—those of Morocco, Algeria and Tunis—will also cherish the idea that one day they too will revel in the joy of doing similar deeds.

"Besides, we were told that there were other reasons that made it necessary, diplomatic reasons discussed at Paris breakfast-tables. But those who took part in such discussions were artists: they added

decoration and finish to the bare facts that I have just given you.

"The General—the same who is coming here to-day—wrote to Paris that the expedition was an excellent idea, and that he proposed to send off 400 men mounted on camels and 800 Arab Goumiers to occupy the wells, which are very few and far between, and consequently that the people of Tademait would be dying of thirst in three months' time, and only too glad to do as they were bid. Whereupon all the other generals were up in arms at such indiscretion."

"Barnavaux," said I, "you are dabbling in state affairs."

"Not at all," he replied. "They were naturally annoyed because it is impossible to make anything of a war with only 400 men, and so there would be no promotion for the big-wigs. If you are not blinded by prejudice you will see that the generals at home were quite right!"

"So an invincible army was sent out, 6,000 men full of enthusiasm went off to the desert on foot, on horseback, on mules, on every possible animal except camels. There were camels in abundance, many

more camels than Frenchmen, but they only carried the smaller guns, provisions and ammunition, and they went as slowly as they pleased.

"The army wandered aimlessly about, divided into three columns, according to an elaborate plan of campaign previously prepared in Paris, and the camels were so numerous that there was not enough water in the wells for them, and so they died with the resignation of true Mohammedan beasts. Money was sent out to buy others to replace them, and the new camels arrived at their leisure, trotti-trotta, cahin-caha, twisting their heads about, slobbering and sniffing at the sand, where lay the skeletons of their brothers and comrades who had died in harness. I have often seen one of them pick up a back or shin bone, and tuck it away in a corner of his mouth just as we do with a cigarette. I have heard they do that because they need—something that chemists sell."

"Phosphate?"

"That's it. But that's only an irreligious and materialistic explanation. The truth is they looked like old philosophical marabouts who wished to say: 'To-morrow it

will be our turn and the turn of the mob that drives us. Inchallah! If you had ever marched for the space of a week beside these infernal brutes chewing shin-bones you would spend the rest of your days writing funeral orations.

"We had with us a number of *joyeux*, rowdies and scamps sent out from France to join the African Disciplinary Battalions. They didn't write funeral orations because of their contempt for anything in the writing line, but they grumbled and rebelled perpetually. It's true that our three columns of 2,000 men apiece did nothing but march and march with no result whatever. Imagine three elephants engaged in pursuing rats through the lack of proportion exercised at head-quarters! Philo—philosophy teaches us that to catch rats nothing bigger than a terrier is required. Anyway we had elephants, not dogs!

"The *joyeux* showed the most damnable discipline while on march. By good luck when we were beyond Fort-MacMahon, beyond Fort-Miribel even, and before Aïn-Souf, a little old Arab fortress by the side of a lake, rank and three parts dry, the occupants of the Ksar, or fortified compound,

fired several rounds at us. Then we lowered the guns from the camels' backs and trained them in the entrance to the fort in accordance with the latest tactics. Amidst the groans of the camels and the thunder of the guns, the gates were blown to pieces and the inhabitants nearly killed with fear. So a bulletin was issued on the victory and the place was occupied by a commandant, all the Goumiers whose camels had died and had not been replaced, a company of Algerian Tirailleurs and, to be rid of them, sixty of the most troublesome of the *joyeux*.

"Chavarot was one of them.

"Then the remainder of the three columns resumed their depressing voyage around the sea of sand.

"You can recall Aïn-Souf to your mind's eye, can't you? In that locality all the Ksour are alike and built on the banks of rivers, invisible, because they flow thirty metres underground. The Arabs, at least not the Arabs but the Berbers, dig tunnels underground to find the river and sometimes follow its course for miles at a stretch. They then plant palm trees and build their Ksar, at least, that is what their ancestors

did. The Arabs of to-day do nothing but water their palm-trees all the year round and rob and pillage when they get the chance.

"At a distance the fort of Ain-Souf looks quite tiny in the middle of the huge desert, and the palm-trees seem like ragged green brooms, but when you get quite close up it looks huge, and so solemn that it almost frightens you. You feel afraid of the towering ramparts built of reddish black earth; of the turrets that are higher still, like the old castle forts of France, and of the pointed dome bristling with little bell turrets, where dwells a Mussulman, part priest, part wizard. The interior of the town is composed of tiny streets, between the high walls on either side, so narrow that they resemble ditches more than anything else.

"Behind these high walls are courtyards surrounded by porticoes, which serve as buttresses, and are also used as shops and dwelling-places. The commanding officer took up his quarters in the largest house; the *joyeux* were told off in one court-yard and the Tirailleurs in another court which was also utilised as a flour store. The Goumiers were scattered all over the place.

"The best of it was that when we wanted

to put up another gate in place of the one that had been destroyed not a single plank of wood was to be found. There are, in fact, no planks in the country, for the wood of the palm-tree is soft and spongy. It appears that the old gates had been brought from Morocco in the days long past.

"While we were making the best of a bad job at Aïn-Souf our columns were continuing their aimless march. A convoy was despatched to their assistance and the valiant warriors of Tademait, who had kept well out of the way of the columns, fell upon the convoy, massacred fifty men and laid hands on the camels and provisions. Then, encouraged by their success, they made for Aïn-Souf, where they arrived one fine night. Leaving their camels under the palm-trees, they crept silently round the Ksar, through an empty sheepfold, and, climbing on one another's shoulders, they crawled one by one through a narrow loophole into the interior."

Here I interrupted Barnavaux.

"But the gates were open!" I said.

"The gates!" repeated Barnavaux, horrified at the idea. "They firmly believed the gates were shut, of course. Do you mean to say you are so ignorant of the tactics of war?

A great general, a genius, in fact, like Napoleon or—or Bismarck, might have been capable of seeing when an open gate was open; but for other folk: 'it is supposed to be shut, therefore it *is* shut!' There you are! and that explains why the Tademait warriors got in through the window instead of the door." After this brief but lucid explanation Barnavaux continued:

"The first man to reach the window gave a good jump, about thirty feet, and landed in the middle of a sack. He cut it open and finding flour inside held out his burnous and began to fill it as fast as he could. The next one did the same and the next, then the whole lot of them. And, in case you don't know, I may as well tell you that that sort of thing is also part and parcel of war.

"There was a Tirailleur keeping guard on the ramparts; and, when he saw white forms swarming about in the sheepfold, he fired at them, partly to obey orders and partly to ease his conscience. Thereupon all the flour-loving warriors also fired.

"What at?" I inquired.

"Oh, anything: at the door of the store-

house, at their comrades, at the sacks, whatever came their way. It was sheer nervousness and you would have done the same had you been there.

"The commissary who was sleeping near the storehouse woke up at the reports thinking: 'The guards scrapping again! some women at the bottom of it!' and picking up the key he went to see what the commotion was about. He had hardly turned the key when five bullets knocked him over, and so he died, a victim to his sense of duty and morality. This devotion was greatly to his credit, I consider, but the next moment there were more than a hundred Arabs in the courtyard and the town was taken.

"Now you've got to remember that every one was asleep, that it was pitch dark, with the commanding officer at the other end of the Ksar, and that the Tirailleurs would not budge an inch without orders. That's just like them, you know, and they thereupon prepared to die like true Mohammedans.

"But the sixty *joyeux* jumped into the courtyard and Chavarot set fire to a thatched roof, partly to see what was going on, and partly out of sheer devilment. Don't dwell for an instant upon his patriot-

ism nor upon that of his comrades, the fifty-nine scamps and rogues and thieves, who accompanied him. Don't dwell upon their devotion to duty either, nor all the fine-sounding things they put in the papers. They did not lose their heads for a moment, they only thought of killing, for they were going to be killed, they were already *being* killed. That, by the way, is another truism with regard to war.

"Another thing they noticed was that nothing so resembles the ordinary jack-knife, the use of which they knew so well, as the blade of a Lebel bayonet. So they went at it hammer and tongs, as if they were having a fight in the Cabaret de la Goutte d'Or. It was at this moment that Chavarot became great, that he showed himself to be the Bonaparte of Apaches and gained his name of Chavarot-La-Victoire. You heard what his voice was like just now, didn't you? Well, it filled the whole of the camp that night, as he roared out:

"'Attention! Fire!'

"His comrades looked at one another. They had dropped their rifles and were using their bayonet blades from choice and through an instinctive lust of blood, and also

because they could manipulate them better. Moreover, their common sense told them that to fire in a courtyard 100 feet square, and in which so many of them were herded, was to kill each other, to massacre their friends and companions. But the Arabs had heard Chavarot's command. They knew what manœuvre to execute before a volley, and how to counteract such a *coup*, so they all crouched down behind the sacks trying to disappear from sight.

"'Now!' yelled Chavarot.

"The fifty-nine understood, and, with their leader, made a single bound, and sixty Arabs were stabbed in the back, just like Christians, without having the time to utter a cry. The others were outnumbered, and without moving held out their necks as a sign of submission. There are none like them for resigning themselves to the inevitable when they recognise it as such.

"That's how Chavarot-La-Victoire—thirteen months' cells and condemned to the African Battalions—saved Aïn-Souf, and the trouble is that he realises it, *a great deal too well!*"

At the moment Barnavaux ended his

story the General was making his tour of inspection. When it was over he ordered Chavarot to be brought out of his stone hovel.

The victor of Aïn-Souf appeared blinking at the light, his pallid countenance still retaining traces of recent debauch. He was clothed in a terrible old brown tunic with all the buttons gone. The General listened to the report and then said sadly :

" Sixty days' cells ! "

And, by way of example and because such things must be said sometimes, he added :

" You are a disgrace to the French army ! "

" People didn't think so at Aïn-Souf ! " replied Chavarot.

Then he quietly allowed himself to be conducted to his cell again, for in common with most of his countrymen, when he had once given expression to his opinion, he did not really care very much what happened to him.

THE JAP

BARNAVAUX and I were sitting at the other end of the carriage, and we saw him come in.

It was a Saturday night, and we had stopped at one of the first stations on the Metropolitan, going towards the Porte Maillot. The passengers were tightly packed in, a great number of them standing clinging to the straps, with the stupid, obstinate look of sheep herded together in a fold, immovable.

When I see the roughness and the tenacity with which a man travelling in a public conveyance will sometimes stick to the place he is to occupy but for a few minutes at the most, absolutely convinced that it is his alone, it makes me think that those who dream of the equal distribution of property are dreaming of a chimera.

When the door of the compartment opened and a fresh inrush of people appeared likely, the hands all took a tighter grip of

the straps, and the feet seemed to become rooted to the floor.

A Frenchman would have retreated before such universal antipathy, but the little Jap came resolutely along with a graceful and imperious assurance, like a cat drawing in her claws. And all the people there: the decorated gentleman, who tries all the harder to be taken for an officer, because he happens to be a hosier in the Rue de la Paix; the pretty woman whom no one can resist merely because she is pretty; the fat lady who tries to make an impression with her manners and her dignity, because she is no longer pretty; the employé who, once free of the shop or the office, makes up for the obsequiousness he is obliged to observe during working hours—all the lot of them made room for him.

These unfriendly folk sat a little closer, they made themselves small for many and divers reasons, which I could more or less read upon their countenance: because of a feeling of hospitality, which the people of our ancient, courteous race know so well how to show to strangers; because of the distant courtesy of this thin, pale foreigner, with his

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slanting eyes; and because of a certain feeling of uncertainty in the presence of the unknown. One knows how a Frenchman, an American, a German would behave if roughly treated or addressed, but this cold, slender Jap, with his gold-spectacled eyes that seemed to see nothing—they made room for him.

Barnavaux alone appeared very excited. "I know him," he said, "'tis Tsounémasa! He's probably a colonel or general now. These fellows are so thin, and their hair so black, that they don't show their age. But when I met him in Tonkin fifteen years ago with his comrade, Benkei, he was a young lieutenant, and they made me understand for the first time at what the Japanese are aiming, and what they intend to do.

"They had come as attachés to follow the last operations of the Colonne Marty against the Pavillons Noirs. I can see the little fellows still. They looked exactly like messenger boys with their regulation caps, their skin-tight tunics, and the breeches that puffed around their thin legs like the leaves of a cabbage run to seed. We were obliged to treat them with politeness, but they were a standing joke; we simply could not help ourselves.

"When they knew we were looking at them they would go along like machines; but when they thought themselves unobserved, or when they were talking with the mandarins, they bowed and scraped and held their hands crossed; in fact, they behaved like any other natives.

"And they called themselves soldiers! The very idea tickled us; they looked like grooms, little, half-grown domestics in uniform, that was all! That is all the yellow races are fit for, thought we!

"When he saw them coming along, Jim Keith, the old English *Légionnaire*, used to mutter, 'Put these studs in my evening shirt, Johnny dear, and then take this letter to the post!' They understood English quite well, but they pretended not to, and they were always the same, very gentle, very cold, and very amiable. They examined our rifles, measured our knapsacks, and weighed our shoes as carefully as a lady's maid. When they bent over a map they made me think of a cat playing with a piece of rustling tissue paper, and I used to mutter to myself, 'Play pretty, little man! Play pretty game!' No, of course no one could be such a fool as to

attach any importance to them, now could he?

"We were journeying further and further, accompanied by these same amiable Japs. We splashed about in the rice fields, and climbed sandstone cliffs, only to find more rice fields beyond. We beat up the whole country so as to render it quite uninhabitable for the natives, and the consequence was that we pillaged and burned villages to such an extent that we made it uninhabitable for ourselves.

"Towards the month of May, at the time of the heavy rains, our column had lost many men. Dysentery is a nasty thing and so is yellow fever.

"I believe that if only the Chinese had gone on retreating before us, they would have killed us all without fuss, and I never could make out why they decided to come to blows with us near Phu-Bin.

"Their position was a good one: a fortified village perched on the top of a semicircle of mountains. In front of the village were a number of trenches to protect the Tirailleurs, and on either side of it were woods that stood out like bastions.

"Then we commenced operations in the good old way. We attacked them from the front, while one detachment was sent a long way round to capture their position from the rear.

"When the Japs saw the detachment file off they shook their heads. I understood their meaning. They considered it too weak; nothing easier than to fall upon it on its way round, cut it to pieces, and so gain the battle. I must confess they didn't look particularly sad as they reflected upon this contingency.

"But you can never tell beforehand what is going to happen in war. As soon as our artillery had driven the Chinese out of the trenches we entered upon our game of bluff and stormed the village itself, and we didn't hurry ourselves over much.

"First of all, we had to get through dense bamboo hedges, backed by walls, and we weren't particularly anxious to be killed on the way in. As a matter of fact, the reason we got in at all was that Jim Keith, old Jim Keith, suddenly fell to the ground, shot in the throat. One of the other fellows, his chum, Delebecque, stared stupidly at his body for a second or two, gave two

or three heartrending sobs, and began to dodge the rain of bullets. He was afraid! Yes, he was afraid, there's no two ways about it, and he began to run away, but instead of running back, he *ran forward!* That is what is called courage, a natural instinct of self-preservation. The danger is less if you face it than if you turn your back on it.

"And when Delebecque, followed by some others, reached the gate of the village, he did not stop to sing a song about it. He made a dash for the bamboo bars, balanced himself on the top and jumped down on the other side.

"The usual thing happened. The Chinese had not expected that, and so they took to their heels. Five minutes later the village was ours.

"I can see Delebecque to this day. He himself opened the gates, but he was deadly pale—reaction, no doubt. Then he cried, '*Vive la légion*!' and a second later, '*Vive la Belgique*!'"

"Why?" I asked, astonished.

"Why? Because he was a Belgian," answered Barnavaux simply. "You wouldn't have him cry, '*Vive la France*!' That

is what is called *esprit de corps*. In the Legion the first thing we think of is the Legion, because 'tis a rattling good corps, then, if time permits, we think of our country.

"But that is not what I was going to tell you. After all, what is there in a soldier giving up his life or in doing his day's march? Nothing; it is only part of his work. But at the moment when Delebecque opened the gates and was bawling at the top of his voice; at the moment when our men, according to the unchanging custom of war, were carefully ransacking the temple of Buddha, and even other houses which did not belong to Buddha, together with inevitable little episodes with the women of the place, I heard another cry, a deep, long-drawn, savage howl, echoing like the sound of a gong. It came from the Japanese officers, the two jolly little grooms. Ah, they didn't look jolly now! They had thrown themselves upon the ground, with no thought for their tunics, their breeches, or their caps.

"They were rolling in the mud of the rice field, seizing it by the handful and throwing it up into the sky while they

said—at the time I didn't understand what they were saying, but later on they repeated the thing again, to some of the Englishmen in the Legion, for they felt no shame at their outburst, quite the contrary. It was their gods that they were upbraiding for the cowardice of the yellow men; they felt that the race was dishonoured. In the bitterness of their fury they cried: 'Things will change! they will change!' Then it was that I realised the dream that they cherish and I felt afraid. Things *have* changed already, changed very much. I think of that little episode whenever I meet one of them, and I ponder on all that will happen in the future. For they haven't finished yet, by any means."

The train stopped at the Bastille. The Jap got out and we followed him. I admired the cut of his clothes and the admirable fall of the trousers over his instep, a detail all the more remarkable because of its rarity. Do not laugh! I know how difficult it is to assimilate such little details of the toilet when one belongs to a different civilisation. Those who have worn the fez of the Mussulman are able to

bear witness to the time it takes to learn how to choose the correct head-dress, and to wear it as it should be worn. But this fellow was unimpeachable.

A handsome girl awaited him at the top of the stairs and I could see by her eyes that she loved him. She was fair, with the soft, velvety cheeks peculiar to very young blonds. She was no great lady, only a working girl; but she was desirable and ardent, and with all her heart she loved the thin, disdainful foreigner, this Oriental with his yellow face and slanting eyes!

As for him, he hardly took any notice of her. He still held to a principle of old Japan, that of remaining impervious to the lusts of the flesh and disdaining feminine weakness. A violent, unpleasant feeling came over me, a jealousy, broad and impersonal, gripped my heart.

"There you are," said Barnavaux, with white, indignant face, spitting out his cigarette end as he spoke, "there you are! The conquest has begun! they are taking our women from us."

And he called after the fair girl's retreating figure:

"*Djoro!*"

Now this, in Japanese, is not exactly complimentary to women; Barnavaux had picked up the expression in the low gaming and drinking houses of Saigon. The girl did not understand, but the Jap frowned and made a sudden gesture, then, controlling himself, he led the girl with him through the crowd. She was his alone. One could see that by the tremors that shook her warm body.

"It is no good getting angry," I said sadly. "When we go to Japan we are only too glad to find the little Mousmees."

"Yes," returned Barnavaux, "but then it's not the same thing; *we* are white men."

JUSTICE

MY horse slipped, spread his forelegs in the clayey slope and commenced to slide along as though he were skating. But he was not doing so for the pleasure of the thing. Coming into contact with a stone his hind legs gave way, his four hoofs came together, and he fell gently down. Barnavaux, whose legs are so long that I have to ride in order to keep pace with him, was wisely leading his horse by the bridle and came quickly to my rescue.

He helped the trembling beast to its feet and remarked reproachfully:

"You weren't holding his head up nor looking where you were going! You *must* look where you are going along these paths. What were you thinking of?"

"Nothing," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders, full of righteous disdain. I could not, however, confess to him that I had been pondering over a passage in Ruskin. He has no knowledge

of the writer, and the science of the beautiful holds but a small place in his daily thoughts.

The passage I allude to describes a little woodland glade in the Jura mountains, near the Fort de Joux: black pines, a steep, lofty, melancholy mountain peak, and a solitary eagle in the silent heavens. The author goes on to remark that had he not known that somewhere near him were living men, had he not known that a labourer was guiding his plough close by, the wonderful landscape would have filled him with terror, not delight, with horror instead of admiration.

Ah, how well did the old English prophet know mankind!

We were crossing rocky mountain peaks 2,000 feet high, travelling along a path so narrow that two men could not stand abreast upon it. The booming sound of an invisible waterfall reached us, and a fine rain, the perpetual drizzle of North Tonkin, froze us to the bone. When by chance it stopped awhile, the heavy mist that hung around soaked tree and ground, wretched man and wretched beast, even more thoroughly than when it fell in the form of honest rain.

Sometimes, however, at brief intervals, a sudden gust of wind tore the clouds asunder and then one caught fleeting glimpses of strange, indistinct and wonderful shapes. Great stalactites hung over our heads as though to prove to geologians that these peaks were formerly the walls of some gigantic grotto, long since crumbled away. We saw palm-trees in sublime isolation growing upon dizzy heights, upon a tiny, rocky balcony, like a geranium in the window of a fifth storey in Paris; and wide-winged vultures, black and motionless, in the heavy mist.

But I hated all these things; they oppressed and made me afraid.

There are people whose delight it is to go in comfortable carriages along well-ordered roads to thrill at the sight of glaciers, at the chaos of rock and wilderness; such people are like children playing at being afraid: it is all pretence.

. . . . . .

Surprised at my silence, Barnavaux began to think he must have offended me, so for the sake of changing the conversation he remarked:

"We aren't the only ones to be travelling

along these beastly paths. Men have passed by here, a whole lot of them, and not so very long ago either. They must be natives, here are the marks of their bare feet; white men too, soldiers, I can track their regulation boots; and a man on horseback, the officer in charge, most likely."

Barnavaux is nothing of a trapper and the reading of trails is not by any means his speciality. But it was easy enough to see that a company of men had passed along there, led by a man on horseback.

Suddenly, as we reached the other slope of the rugged mountain path, a great gust of wind swept the fog aside. My horse, with mane a-bristle, stopped as though on the edge of an abyss.

It was not an abyss that met our eyes, but a very wonderful piece of work, the work of man, majestic, barbaric and unexpected: the great stairway of the mandarins. To descend into the valley, the engineers of the conquering Chinese had not troubled to calculate slopes nor lay out winding paths. What would have been the good of it? The ministers, officials and war chiefs of the old Empire deigned to

ride neither on mules nor in chariots. They went their way like kings, borne along in palanquins, and accompanied by their men-at-arms, their slaves, and their porters. What, therefore, was the good of wasting time and land? Three thousand hard stone steps went in a straight line sheer down to the valley beneath.

I pictured to myself these austere, patient, yet luxurious invaders, as they reclined on the cushions of their palanquins, their thin lips pursed up in an expression of disdain; they looked like haughty old pedagogues holding their position as Governors of their provinces merely because they could write. I could hear them lashing the yellow-coated heralds and soldiers with their harsh voices; I could see the villagers, poor, conquered slaves, prostrating themselves upon the ground all along the huge stairway which, with the conquerors, seemed to descend from heaven.

And just as though such a cortège had really come to life again, we saw before us a long line of men stretching from the last steps of the stairway right into the plain beyond. Barnavaux, with his keen sight, remarked:

"It's an *officier de l'arme*,"—he meant of the Colonial infantry—"with militiamen and—and coolies, I think; natives, anyhow, carrying something on their backs."

The caravan, which had caught sight of us, halted to allow us to catch them up. We did not get along very quickly, because I had been obliged to dismount, and our horses jibbed at the slippery steps. As we drew nearer, Barnavaux said:

"They're not coolies, and they're not carrying packs, but pillories. They're prisoners!"

The officer in charge of the convoy came up to us.

"I am Captain Gillmann," he said, "from the Yen-Minh district."

I introduced myself and we shook hands, but my eyes were on the prisoners. Just imagine a man with his head so fixed between the rungs of a ladder that he cannot get it out, and you have some idea of the Chinese pillory. It is made of bamboos and closed by a padlock; although quite light it cannot be removed without unlocking the padlock, and is a better means of keeping a man captive than the convict's leg-irons. How can a prisoner escape with a burden

upon his shoulders that catches in all the ashes and refuses to go through the doorways? A good pillory is well worth two gaolers.

"I see you are looking at those poor devils," said Captain Gillmann. "I have to take them to the next station, whence they will be conveyed by easy marches as far as Haiphong, thirty miles away, where they are to be tried. Ah, it's dirty work for a soldier! I wouldn't so much mind being Commissioner of Police, but when it comes to doing gaolers' work!"

He spoke incessantly, like a man who had suffered from enforced silence long enough to be tired of his solitude, and yet not long enough for him to have lost all taste for conversation. He was an Alsatian, from Wissemburg, with a square forehead, pointed chin, and close-cropped, black hair, as thick and hard as a horse's mane. His eyes were brown or green, according to the light, not large but extremely observant. Added to this was a lean, muscular body, so supple in appearance that one would have liked it to fall from a great height, in order to see how high it would rebound.

While he was speaking a soldier had sounded the current, which was rapid but not impassable. As a matter of fact, Barnavaux and I crossed without getting more than our boots wet. Surrounded by the soldiers, the prisoners came next, much hampered by the pillories. One of them stumbled, fell out of rank, lost his balance and the water carried him along without giving him a chance to regain his footing. The current swept him along, he was already out of our reach.

Captain Gillmann frowned in the way he would have done had a badly-laden mule dropped his pack.

"Dirty work!" he repeated.

Then putting his horse to the gallop he raced down the river bank, and wading into the stream fished out the man at arm's length, then, giving him one of his stirrups to hold, he returned, as proud, energetic, talkative and discontented as ever.

"Poor devil!" he said, "it would have been much better for him to drown once and for all, instead of going such a distance to die as he will do at Haiphong!"

For some years past the chiefs of the districts can only sentence their people to

a few days' imprisonment. All cases of serious offence or crime have to be tried at the regular courts. If you can picture to yourself the annoyance of some feudal lord, whose judicial authority was confined to petty cases alone, and who had been deprived of both axe and executioner, you will have some small idea of the feeling the district chiefs nourish for red or black-robed justice! As, in my opinion, the former were in the wrong, I undertook to persuade Captain Gillmann to share my conviction, but he replied abruptly:

"You don't understand. This man is a thief; under the old system he would have got off with a flogging, while at Haiphong, where they pretend to be so humane, he will die—he's bound to. Look here, one day I arrested a man called Bang, for murder. Well, ever since I knew what happened to him I have asked myself if I was not wrong in bringing him to justice."

We slowly led the way, while the sad procession continued its march. As he chewed the end of his briar pipe Captain Gillmann continued his story:

"It's when I think of poor Bang, who killed a man, that all this judging business

gets on my nerves. And yet I was the man to catch him. I was the cause of all his misery."

"Bang was a Méo chief. Do you know anything about the Méos? They are to be found on all the rocks, peaks and cones of the extraordinary Dong-Quang country, which is so rugged that it is hard to find a single spot on which one may sit without sliding down some 300 feet or so. Of course there is the tableland, but it is always freezing there, and the ground, moreover, is covered with millions of little splinters of rock, so sharp and strong that when we made the roadway each little rock that came in the way had to be blown up. And yet, as you know, the tableland, rocks and peaks are all tilled and planted with maize. The Méos see to that.

"When I went there years ago to trace out the mule tracks in my district these fellows used to amuse me the whole day through. My men would go along, first placing a layer of broken stone upon the track, and then a layer of earth to make it adhere. Well, the Méos, men, women and children, followed them with baskets full of

maize seeds. They stole handfuls of earth, just as sparrows steal a wheat-ear and then made off, climbing rocks on which a lizard could hardly have found a footing. They placed the handful of earth and a few seeds in any little hollow, and then came down and repeated the process. It is their custom to sow in stony ground and yet to reap their little harvest.

"It is a strange thing, but the Méo girls have a special fondness for the men who live in the most inaccessible places and those furthest away from rivers and springs. When they are married they have to fetch the water, sometimes two or three miles away, and, as the road is always terribly steep and rough, they have three or four hours to themselves, in which they are not bullied by their husbands. During this time they spin flax to make the pleated skirts and sailor collars which form their entire costume, a very curious one, by the way. I may say these women love money and are not easily frightened.

"Such are the Méos. They are as hardy and as avaricious as the Auvergnats, drink like fish, are as vindictive as Corsicans, and as immoral as the rest of us.

"I am telling you all these details to explain about Bang. He was a chief, the descendant of kings. Sixty years ago, you know, the Méos were a great people. Their king was a rough specimen, who burned villages and cut off heads wholesale, and who had built a stronghold for himself, the walls of which were twenty feet thick. It was the Chinese who, later on, laid waste their country and made savages of them.

"Bang's brother had killed one of his friends whom he had found with his wife in a maize field. Now, don't you agree that it was fundamentally a family affair in which no one should have interfered? Unfortunately it was also a crime, and therefore to be referred to the authorities and investigated. A police-constable went to Bang and said:

"'You've got to sign a paper saying that your brother killed A-Phin.'

"'I will sign nothing,' replied Bang. 'It's against the custom of my country. You'd better have some breakfast with me.'

"So they had a friendly meal together, and Bang accompanied the constable, whose only escort was an interpreter, half way

home again, when the constable suddenly said:

"'So that's understood? You won't sign anything?'

"'Not a thing,' replied the Méo chief. 'A thousand apologies for being so disobliging!'

"'Take off your turban,' cried the constable to his interpreter, 'and secure this man!'

"The words were hardly out of his mouth when shots were heard from all the rocks around—when the poor fellow's body was found later they counted thirty-seven wounds—Bang had raised a body-guard of his friends, who, crouching behind the rocks, had followed him all the way.

"He then returned home, loaded his wife with his tools, weapons, cartridges, copper vessels, the tablets of his ancestors, and the spinning frame; about twenty-five pounds in weight in all, but nothing for the back of a Méo woman. Then he unearthed his store of piasters, tied them in a corner of his *keao* and started straight for China, going like a wolf over mountain and precipice, while we, the

masters of the country and charged with his capture, lay in wait for him along the roads.

"But of course I had a spy in my employ, an honest fellow to whom I gave a quarter of a piaster a day, plus the food of his wife and 'boy.' He traded under the guise of a salt merchant and a fraudulent one at that. Now one day the grandmother of the *ly-truong* or native *sous-préfet* as he might be called, died of rheumatism, and her grandson, obedient to the conventions and the wishes of his friends, seized the occasion to give a grand fête in honour of the occasion. I have never seen anything so comical, not even at the Foire du Trône. They had merry-go-rounds, and tourneys, with the combatants attired like knights in the time of Gengis-Khan, mounted on real horses and armed with bamboo lances. The mourners bearing the coffin were covered with great veils of bleached hemp that hung above their ears, and with wigs of yellow tow upon their heads, and all around the coffin, before, behind, and beneath it, were men who danced and capered, making the most diabolical grimaces the while. Last, but not least, there was swine's flesh and

brandy in abundance, all at the expense of the afflicted grandson.

"My spy was having a good time on his own when he met a friend from China who was staying there for a few days.

"'How are you?' said the friend from China. 'What are you doing here?'

"'You can see for yourself,' said my man, 'I'm a salt merchant.'

"'And working for the government at the same time,' said the Chinaman with a wink. 'Who are you on the look-out for, just now? Bang? I know where he is: in China, but quite close to the frontier about twelve miles from here.'

"And that's how the poor devil was caught. In the twinkling of an eye, the two Lascars had decided on their plan of action. The Chinaman invited Bang to a great dinner. In accordance with the Méo custom it is *de rigueur* for the invited guest to show a fit appreciation of his host's hospitality by falling under the table towards the close of the entertainment. Bang adhered with the greatest exactitude to this custom. That explains why he crossed the frontier, bound hand and foot, but without

being conscious of the fact, for he was as sound asleep as a top. He woke up in the custody of the men who had gone to meet him at the frontier, and, comprehending what had happened to him, he cried out in loud tones of despair :

"'Kill me! Kill me at once! The French will send me to the Delta!'

"And it is a fact that as far as the Méos are concerned sending them to the Delta, in other words to Hanoi or Haiphong, not as prisoners even, but as witnesses in some case, means death to them, death by inches, and a horribly painful one at that, to judge by the fear they seem to entertain for it. The Méos can only exist on the mountains, in the open air and the cold. It is an absolute fact; they cannot do without exercise either, even in their own country. One might as well try to keep a mountain goat in a cage.

"Bang implored the widow of A-Phin, his brother's victim, to execute her own vengeance by sticking a knife into him. The widow was most anxious to oblige him, but I had to deny her the pleasure. I knew quite well that this would have been the best way out of the difficulty, but it was against

the law. Bang must be tried at Haiphong; that meant a twenty-two days' journey.

"I wrote out my report, which was attended to in the usual way, during which time my prisoner awaited events in his cell. I had him put in irons to begin with, but was soon told that he was ill, so I had them removed. That did not suffice, however; each morning the same story: 'The prisoner is getting weaker, much weaker.' I sent him from my own table the food that he liked the best, with bread which he looked upon as a kind of delicious cake, cigarettes and plenty of brandy. He thanked me with his caressing eyes and said:

"'Why be so careful of me if I have to die?'

"I was following the instructions which continued to impress upon me the fact that the prisoner *must not die* before he had been tried.

"When we reached Haiphong they took over two months to investigate the case and he grew steadily weaker. Nothing now remained of the agile giant that he had been but a dreadful skeleton. Ravaged by fever he could eat nothing; the roof over his head

was removed to give him more air, for the heat was killing him.

"The manner in which the inquiry was conducted was most remarkable, too. The questions put to him were translated by an Annamite interpreter, and Bang replied to them in Méo, for the very good reason that it was the only tongue that he knew, and one, be it understood, unintelligible to any but the Méos themselves—a kind of whistling rather than speaking.

"Bang had been given a bamboo bedstead, and all day long he hid beneath it like a terrified dog.

"At last he was taken to Haiphong to be judged, and the comedy of the examinations started anew. The questions were asked in the Annamite language, and Bang replied to them in Méo, probably doing his best to explain, in his absurd patois, that he could not understand what was meant. The interpreter mentioned in his turn that he could not understand the accused, and some distinguished philologists thereupon gave it as their opinion that no one ever would understand the accused. Upon which the Court decided that the questions must nevertheless be asked in accordance with

the law! And they were asked. During all this time Bang was moving, and twisting his hands, for he was on the point of death.

"However, they managed to make him rise to hear his death sentence, but it did not trouble him. First of all, he could not understand a word of what was said; and secondly he was not in a fit condition to understand even his own language. Slipping quietly back on his bench he died.

"I suppose it must have been a great consolation for the Court to reflect that they had managed to keep Bang alive long enough to be tried, and judged and condemned, although circumstances over which they had no control prevented them from carrying out the sentence. But I have regretted, ah, how many times have I not regretted that I kept A-Phin's widow from sticking her knife into him. Now don't you agree that there should be a means of judging and executing native criminals in their own territory and according to their own laws and customs?"

"Possibly," I replied thoughtfully; "but then they would be empaled, have splinters of wood thrust under their nails, and finally

be hacked to pieces, all of which is contrary to our ideas of right and wrong."

"And yet it would be the less cruel of two cruel actions," said Captain Gillmann seriously.

"There is another thing," said Barnavaux thoughtfully. "I think that when these people are judged by Europeans they absolutely fail to understand the reasons why they are either acquitted or condemned. They have no idea of the meaning of justice, in fact. I remember once in Madagascar seeing an *ombiasy*, or sorcerer, tried for the murder of a European. He was a horrible blackguard, and I think it was only right and fitting to shoot him as they did two days later, but I take my dying oath that he did not understand a single item of the proceedings. He had been provided with a counsel who pleaded after the address of the attorney-general. This counsel, gesticulated, called the judges and the accused himself to witness, in thundering tones of eloquence.

"The jury retired and returned five minutes later with the verdict, 'Guilty;' which was interpreted to the nigger. He

showed no sign of astonishment, but only turned to the Malagasy soldier guarding him:

"'Why did *two* men speak against me?' said he; 'one would have been enough!'

"You see he imagined that his counsel had also demanded his condemnation. That was all the interpretation he placed upon the speeches and gestures of the latter."

"But," I said, "the important thing surely is that, at any rate, he was well defended."

"Not at all," answered Barnavaux simply. "What was far more important was for him to die with a firm belief in the justice of the white man, and not in his vengeance. But, believe me, every detail of the whole system is at fault. Before leaving with you for North Tonkin, I was present one day at the petty sessions in Hanoi. I had been told that at the time of the Thêt, which is the Annamite New Year, the natives would do any mortal thing to get a little more money to spend on a spree. They would even sell the very flowers that adorn the tombs of their ancestors, could they find any one fool enough to buy them. I thought I was in for a curious experience.

"But I had reckoned without my host. In the first place, I had clean forgotten the interpreter. In these parts, the law reads, writes, speaks, and understands French and French alone; and, as the natives do not understand one word of it, they have an interpreter to act as a go-between. The methods of the latter as he proceeded to work filled me, I must confess, with unbounded admiration.

"The chief magistrate said to him:

"'Ask the accused why he only took 34 [illegible] of the 35 watches in the possession of [illegible] plaintiff who keeps a jeweller's shop.'

[illegible] interpreter translated the question, [illegible] accused replied in the most musical, [illegible]robably the most eloquent of fashions.

[illegible] musical, because the native speech [illegible]d on intonations. If you say A in C[illegible]r, it means white; the same sound in [illegible] means black; in other keys it may mean [illegible]ernity, the postman or a handsome [illegible] man—it all depends on the intonation. Then I call it the most eloquent because the native accused of the theft had made a very long speech. All that I heard of the interpretation thereof was this brief and remarkable translation:

"'The accused says he is seventeen years of age.'

"If that interpreter got a good screw," went on Barnavaux, "I wouldn't mind his job. I always imagined it was much more difficult than that!"

We began to laugh, but Barnavaux went on:

"Wait a minute. That isn't all! After this business was settled, another was brought forward. This was a native accused of stealing a hundred piasters from his neighbour at the game of *ba-kouan*, which really is a kind of *bloquette*. I couldn't catch a word of what was going on, it was nothing but prolonged whispering on the part of the victim, confused remarks from the judges and a kind of clucking from the thief. Once when I was in Paris I happened to be present at an examination held for well-dressed young gentlemen. Well, this trial reminded me of that, and it was most unpleasant for those who had come in the hope of adding to their knowledge.

"As soon as I found it was useless to try and hear anything, I went for a stroll along the banks of the Petit-Lac. You can't think what a pretty strip of water

it is. Some people want to have it filled in under the pretext that it is a hotbed of mosquitoes, but it would be an awful pity.

"It was evening, and I could see the sun setting at the further end of the lake, where the trees are; trees, deep-rooted in the water, that seemed to move and beckon: slender bamboos, bushes with dark, contrasting shades of red and green, and scarlet-blossomed hibiscus.

"It is impossible to describe the effects of the setting sun in countries such as these. Everything is bathed in soft, glowing, rosy light. Such a description comes glibly enough to the tongue and conveys nothing of the reality of the scene. A white-ruffed crow comes and perches on the highest branch of a tree and gives you a feeling you have felt before, maybe, when looking in the lamplight at pink silk stuffs from China. In the middle of the lake there is a pagoda nestling among the bushes. Its red and blue pillars are reflected in the water, which is not actually transparent, but through which the light comes as through fine porcelain. And the houses along the Quai d'Orient, which are only

very humble, poor even, look as though they were great palaces fashioned of gold, and fit for kings. Ah, it is beautiful, it is peaceful and grand, the farewell of the sun in these lands! And it makes one fancy all kinds of things.

"As I was solemnly contemplating all this, an Annamite came up to me and made a semi-deferential *laï*, that is to say, he joined his hands together, and waited with bent body for me graciously to grant him my attention. I recognised him at once; he was the man accused of stealing the money at *ba-kouan*. Thinking from his presence before me that he had been acquitted, I congratulated him.

"He replied, in the very primitive French, that he had not dared speak before the judges, that he did not know the address of 'Missieu' Bérenger, and was anxious to discover it.

"I at once jumped to the conclusion that he had profited by the reprieve which the beneficent law permits, thanks to this senator,[1] and I imagined he wished to thank him personally.

[1] René Bérenger, who introduced into France the law of reprieve.

"I was wrong, however; things were more complicated than that. In the first place, he frankly admitted having taken the 115 piasters from Pou-Seng, the Chinaman, who, in his opinion, was of no importance whatsoever. He explained to me the mysteries of his case, mysteries which I could never have grasped alone.

"'Me take piasters, good. But A-Pik, he Chinaman, he see. Sao, he Annamite, he see. No good: two witness no good. Make A-Pik sign paper, make Sao sign paper.'

"'What for?' I asked, thinking I had reached the limit of surprise.

"'Promise me pay 10 piasters to A-Pik, 10 piasters Sao, and they witness much good.'

"To witness 'much good' meant, of course, a false witness. My interesting friend continued:

"'A-Pik he witness much good, say me no steal. Sao, dirty thief, he keep 10 piasters, say me steal. Missieu attorney—me no give him piasters—he speak much bad. Then Missieu Troubinal he speak, say me guilty, but me no go gaol, because Missieu Bérenger he speak much good. Then

me want find Missieu Bérenger, give him 10 piasters!'

"I advised him to write to Paris."

"What?" I exclaimed, "you didn' tell him to do that, Barnavaux!"

"*Dame*," he answered, "the scoundrel wanted to. I can't help wondering whether 'Missieu' Bérenger ever managed to read his letter from China. I am sorry if he never did, for the Annamite must have made a remarkable suggestion to him. In fact he told me of it:

"'Me thank Missieu Bérenger, send 10 piasters and promise Missieu Bérenger 10 piasters, if he make me have all the money.'

"'What money?'

"I felt that my brain was giving way, and I am sure you will never guess what the fellow wanted. Yet he was perfectly logical. Seeing that the '*troubinal*' had not sent him to prison for a fault he knew he had committed, he gathered from this that his crime was no crime, and consequently a further small tip to 'Missieu' Bérenger should give him back the money he had stolen from the Chinee."

"Barnavaux," I said, "your tales have no common sense about them."

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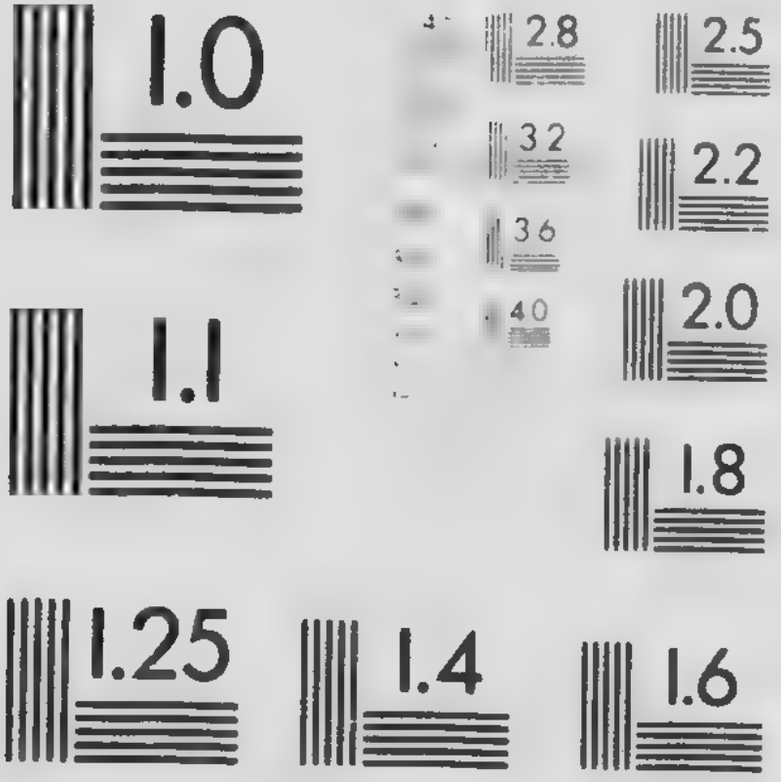

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"But *I'm* not wanting in common sense," replied Barnavaux stubbornly, "while as for all the judges, the deputies and newspaper fellows and the like! Do you imagine that the ideas of right and wrong we teach the niggers are any better, or as good even as their own. And, as for the fools the Government sends out there, I've seen one or two of them."

"So have I, alas!" I replied.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

CLOSE to the shore where our junk was anchored some men passed along, light-hearted in spite of the everlasting rain, for the rice spirit or absinth of the Chinese merchant had put new life into their veins. Lights glimmered and a bugle sounded, for we were not two hundred yards away from where a corps of *légionnaires* was stationed.

It is a sad thing when you have been sailing for days and days along the Red River in a sampan, in which you can neither stand upright nor lie down at full length; it is a sad thing to see houses and to smell cooking, and yet not dare to spend a night under one of their roofs. Now, if I have been able to maintain the best of terms with my friends of the Foreign Legion, it is because I have never insisted upon finding in them qualities which they do not possess. Barnavaux and I would most certainly have found a blazing fire to dry our wet clothing, a

comfortable bed, and, perhaps—for a little, had one pressed the matter—something else besides.

We should have been most unreasonable under such circumstances, therefore, to complain next day if we missed trifles from our kit. That is why we made up our minds to stay on board.

In the straw hut set apart for the crew, our "boys" had cooked some sort of stew, which we were now devouring as we sat, wrapt in melancholy, and shivering in the cold night air. For weeks we had been negotiating the river, and during the whole time the horrible misty rain peculiar to Annam had not ceased to fall. There was water above, below, and around us. It fell from the clouds as though they had been huge, grey, dripping sponges; it remained suspended in the air like dust; it swept along, brown and muddy at our feet, spiteful and silent, continuing as it has done for thousands of centuries its Penelope-like labours; creating with the rapidity of a skilled workman the flat stretches of country wherein the natives sow the castor-oil plant. But it never plays fair, for it places the sand at the bottom, and above the sand the muddy

clay; then it takes a wicked delight in dragging out the sand again. The clay falls and the castor-oil plants start off upon their travels, the weight of the mud upon their roots holding them bolt upright in the water. All through the day this procession of corpses makes you giddy and drowsy; everything you rest your gaze upon appears to be covered with stripes, and you have to keep closing your eyes.

At night you are awakened by unpleasant sounds of oozing mud, and the perpetual crashing and upheaving keep you in a constant state of unrest. The result of the everlasting dampness with which you are surrounded is that the fever holds you in its grip. You dream that you are lying in your last resting-place, that the grave-digger is at work beside you with his spade.

. . . . . .

I told one of the "boys" to bring us a bottle of port wine, for I felt it was high time to try and get the better of our depression. Ah, if we could only have lain down in a blessed state of semi-drunkenness that would have driven away the nightmare of our thoughts and created for us a new world!

But we were frozen to the marrow, and the wine failed to warm us.

Suddenly we heard a voice from the bank saying :

"Won't you offer a glass of wine to a Russian nobleman ? "

The voice was slightly drunken, with an attempt at roughness of speech, the former real and the latter put on; for no matter how hard a man tries, he cannot eliminate youthful impressions, and continues to speak as he was taught to speak when a child. You could tell that the voice was making fun of itself ; it came to us, ironical, elegant and degraded.

"Won't you offer a glass of wine to a Russian nobleman ? " it repeated.

I pointed to a seat under the awning of the sampan, and placed another glass upon the folding table. The man threw his leg over the side of the boat with an easy, sideward movement, reminding me of a fox going into a poultry yard, and greeted us with nonchalant ease.

"Ossip Dimitrief," he said, introducing himself. "Gunner in the 2nd Legion—just at present ! "

He sat down and thoughtfully sampled

his port. His shaking hands, dilated eyes, and the waxy tint of his skin showed him to be a heavy drinker of the type that never staggers in his walk nor babbles foolishly, until the day of madness or death. With a harsh laugh he said: "Thank you. It is not easy to get wine like this out here!"

It is difficult to define what it is that distinguishes the man who belongs to what is called good society. It is rather what he leaves undone than what he actually does, and what he leaves unsaid; the control he has over his gestures, his eyes, his mouth, and the whole of his body. Two minutes had hardly elapsed before I was treating this *légionnaire* like a man of the world. Poor Barnavaux, who is so ingenuously outspoken when we are alone together, became sulky, and put on the detached air which he keeps for the benefit of his superiors and all those that "a fellow can't talk to!"

What a tremendously powerful thing is caste, with similarity of education and culture! This man, who had so strangely forced himself upon us, filled me with indescribable suspicion, almost with antipathy. He was curiously like the horrible mist that surrounded us, imperceptible and night-creating.

His unspoken thoughts were impenetrable, and his every word expressed not only a contempt for mankind in general but also for himself; and yet, though it had taken me years to make a confidant of rough and honest Barnavaux, this stranger immediately awakened within me memories of books Barnavaux had never read; of men to whom he would never have dared to speak; of women gay with flowers, with diamonds sparkling on their white necks. The names of popular actresses came back to me; of close-curtained rooms; of men who played an important part in the affairs of their country; all these memories evoked by the drunkard before me! An irresistible curiosity prompted me to attempt to pierce the mystery that his life contained; I found myself making up all kinds of tales about him.

Some years before, a foreign man-of-war had come, in solemn state, to receive on board the body of a soldier of the Legion, who had died in Algeria, and whose remains were accorded the honours rendered only to princes of the blood royal. I grew impatient and distrait. He sneered again.

"You'd like to know who I really am,

wouldn't you?" he said. "I've told you once, Ossip Dimitrief."

I made a gesture indicating that I asked no questions.

"You know that is not my real name, don't you? Of course, but what would my real name convey to you? What interests you is my story. Well, it sometimes pleases me to relate it. It pleases me now."

To draw away the mosquitoes Barnavaux had carried the lamp to the other end of the sampan. The darkness upon the river had become so supernaturally intense that it filled one with an instinctive fear of bumping into it, as it were, of knocking up against the bulky, slimy-looking mass of shadow. The river went on eating its ways into the banks, and the lumps of earth continued to slip into it, with the same little exasperating splash.

"Yes," went on the man, "I was a personage ten years ago. People addressed me as 'Your Excellency,' but that is nothing: many people have that title in my country. Anyhow, at the War Office I came next to the chief. Well, to-day, now that I do not possess a single decora-

tion, not even a good-conduct stripe, I find it less difficult and less painful to obey than I did with the whole of the army of a great country under me, and one fool, and only one, above me. What good would it do me to-day to be made a corporal or a sergeant? What difference would it make in the condition of things as far as I am concerned? But in those days, between the possibility of doing as I liked with several million men, of commanding, instructing, and making soldiers of them, there was but one obstacle, one man I tell you, and that man, as I said before, was a born fool.

"Max Stierner, a philosopher whose books you may have read, says somewhere that every anarchist is an autocrat. I may add that every Russian is an autocrat and therefore an anarchist. I suffered in both mind and body at having to carry out the idiotic schemes of a fool, and never my own. When I went into his office; when I had to bring my heels to the salute and assume the correct pose my very bones ached. He was aware of this, I am sure, and took a special and increased delight in hurling at me, as he did at everybody, the few

phrases that he mistook—fine general that he was—for accepted ideas. I tell you I am sure he knew of my impatience and my hatred, for I had under me a *sous-chef*, in other words, a sneak and a spy. The fellow was possessed of all the vilest and most detestable of the virtues. How can I put it? Well, the virtues naturally appertaining to a *sous-chef*. He was an excellent worker, an excellent father, and an excellent husband. He was thrifty and laid out his money wisely, while all that remained to me was debts. He was hierarchical to obsequiousness, to others as well as to me. But as soon as my back was turned he would say that I was neither prudent, virtuous, nor old enough to fulfil my duties. I know he said that sort of thing, for had I been in his place I would certainly have said the same of him. In my turn, I never hesitated to say that his unvarying and mean respectability made of him an excellent man, suited to be a clerk in some petty business.

"During the long months I fostered such ideas, my affairs meanwhile became more and more complicated. I saw the moment fast approaching when the claims of my

creditors would oust me from my position, which would be filled by my rival, the man under me.

"Just at this time the military attaché of one of the smaller Balkan States came to call upon me. He began in a tone of the greatest depression and discouragement:

"'I have just seen your chief, and he has swept away all my hopes. We shall have to diminish our armaments and remove troops from the frontier. He assures me that the Powers have agreed to his plans, so of course we are forced to give in, and all our efforts will have been for nothing, all our millions spent in vain, and our future as a country compromised.'

"I told you just now that my nerves were in a state of irritation. I had always maintained that it was a gross mistake to oppose the development of the little State in question, and also I knew—the despatches were there under my hand—that the great chief lied, for there was no *entente* between the Powers. This was a sample of his usual bluff, some of the nonsense he was in the habit of talking and, perhaps, of believing too.

"'He's fooling you!' I said.

"I am a man of very decisive speech and thought, as you can see for yourselves. But that day my fury gave a remarkable definiteness to what I had to say. I began to show him that he had been made game of, and that all his government had to do was to stick to their guns. 'All this *entre nous*, you understand, my dear fellow'?

"The attaché then proceeded to call upon my *sous-chef* and it amused me to think of what that amiable fool would say to him. When I heard his study door open, I opened mine, just for the sake of hearing: 'You have my deepest sympathy. Personally——'

"I knew that personally the poor creature had no ideas on the subject, and never had any.

"The following day one of the chief secretaries came to me. bringing, as he always did, the translation to the ciphered despatches forwarded from the telegraph offices, and sent by the various attachés to their chiefs. As you know, there is no cipher that can resist the expert reader. Before being handed to the chief the translation had to receive my signature. I glanced indiffer-

ently through several and then, turning deadly pale, read as follows:

"'Despatch from the Attaché X— to the Government of ——.

"'No importance need be attached to my conversation with the Minister of War, details of which I wired you previously. Fortunately, I have been able to discover proofs—' I glanced at the secretary with the look of a creature at bay. He was carelessly fingering a paper-knife. I continued—'during the course of a conversation with—'

"The name—my name!—there was a blank. Why? Why was it not down in black and white like the rest? A glimmer of hope, which I dared not cherish, sprang up within me. Summoning all my strength of will I calmly inquired:

"'This is a strange despatch. Why have they left out the name of this indiscreet person?'

"'Ah, that's just the difficulty,' said the secretary. 'In the original there are two ciphers evidently agreed upon beforehand which mean nothing to us. It is a pity, for if it were only known how it had come about—'

"I was saved! saved! saved! The thought gave me strength, youth, life. Doubtless the great wave of renewed life that swept over me affected my brain. I don't believe in the devil, though many in my place would do so, for without giving myself time to think I said:

"'I know the name, I know it! I heard the last words of the conversation mentioned here, words that I did not understand until now,' and, taking a pen, I filled in the name of the man under me."

"You devil!" cried Barnavaux, "You did that? *You devil!*"

The aristocratic-looking *légionnaire*, with his subtle air of authority, whom Barnavaux had not dared address before, was now treated in the same way as he would have treated a soldier in one of the *compagnies de discipline* or a gaol-bird of one kind or another.

The *légionnaire* answered him:

"Yes, I did it! I did it! and to this day I can't think why. At first it seemed like some huge joke against the fool who was so proud of his honesty and discretion and temperate life, of all his mean, negative virtues. It was only on second

thoughts I realised that I had just done a thing that could never be undone. That is all of a piece with Life, from beginning to end; everything we do is irreparable. The evening before, without a thought, I had committed an act of betrayal, just for the sake of a moment's satisfaction. Theologians speak of the spirit of evil, that which makes a man do evil for evil's sake; do it without rhyme or reason, simply because it is his fate to commit a crime, or because, for the space of one moment, he is possessed by the spirit of evil. Now I had acted under the influence of that spirit.

"It seems absurd when we think that, if a soldier gives up his gun or his cartridges to a spy, he is condemned by law and punished, for the crime is so small and unimportant. I had given up the whole of the secret policy of my country, and the consequences of my deed were impossible to foresee, but what matter? It was only an indiscretion! a *faux pas*! and the man upon whose shoulders I had shifted the blame would only be recalled. Recalled, did I say? They would be forced to state publicly why they were recalling him and, of course, that was out of the question. No, he would be

sent to some distant post, together with a secret memorandum spelling death to his career, that is all! and what was he to the State? While as for me! In the first place, I was *I*, *Myself*, the man that I was! and, in the second place I was an impelling force. Do you understand? a force!"

I lifted my hand with a gesture of loathing, but he interrupted me:

"Spare me the virtuous nonsense you are about to utter! I know it all, and, what is more, have said it all to myself. I have a brain, you know, that generates all kinds of ideas, a very active, useful brain. Many thanks, but I am sufficient to myself. If you insist upon having your say, I will reply that I probably acted on that day for the very same reason that inspires me to-day with the foolish, cowardly desire to speak of the matter, because the weather was damp, and dark, and dirty, just as it is to-night. At such moments a man is nothing but mud, like the ground upon which he treads. He is not himself. Well, seeing that I was not myself that day, why should I have denounced myself?

"I let everything slide, and when they questioned me I accused the fellow again,

and quoted the words I had heard him utter. After all, it was his place to defend himself. He defended himself exceedingly badly, because he had nothing to say, and sent in his papers. Then I breathed afresh.

"A week later I was quite myself again, and was even filled with pride at the consciousness of the power that was mine. Arriving at my office one morning, I was gaily humming a tune, when the attaché was announced. I had reckoned without him. *He knew.* I should have to endure his eyes upon me. Well, and what then? There were very many reasons why he should keep his mouth shut.

"He came in, smiling slightly, and I brazened it out and smiled in return.

"'Well,' said he, after twenty minutes' idle conversation, 'that affair went off very well the other day. You are a clever fellow and have done us a great service. Now I want to know about—'

"I understood. His meaning was as clear as if he had riveted a chain to my feet. Oh, it was very simple! the game must go on. What I had done once, lightly, would have to continue for his satisfaction. I pulled myself together and said:

"'I refuse! Do you understand? I refuse.'

"'Come,' said he, 'we will talk of this again. In fact, it is quite inevitable that we talk of it again!'

"He looked at me as a man looks at a dog that he wishes to cow, and my eyes fell.

"'Yes,' said he, 'we will speak of this again. You must have time to think the matter over, my dear fellow.'

"And he went off whistling.

"I should be forced to obey, to obey him! And in return? Ah, no! it should never be. I took a sheet of paper and wrote to His Excellency.

"When the letter was finished I sealed it and put it in my pocket. I did not post it until I was about to cross the frontier. Three days later I enlisted in the Legion, in which a man can disappear as completely as if he were drowned. I've disappeared."

He stopped, but neither of us spoke. He rose, and, seeing that we remained seated and motionless, gave a little sneering laugh and said:

"Come, give me another glass of port."

I took an unopened bottle from the case and held it out to him without a word, as I

would have done to a beggar; he grew pale, and seizing the bottle, flung it into the dark river.

"Fools!" he cried, "fools! You would not hesitate to kill a destructive creature if it got in your way and made you stumble. Well, three parts of the human race are nothing but destructive and contemptible animals! Fools!"

He stepped over the edge of the boat and disappeared into the night.

THE PIGEONS

"YOU will come? Oh do! I waited for you all last night!"

Barnavaux threw a small coin into the saucer Madame Edmée was holding out as she spoke, and put his hands over his ears to show that the orchestra prevented him from hearing what she said. But he was lying.

Dressed in a very *décolleté* bodice of pale grey silk covered with a network of sequin that hid the worn material beneath, Madame Edmée gazed at him with sorrowful adoration, in which were mingled desire, jealousy, and a dog-like devotion. She made no more attempt to conceal her love and distress than to conceal her waning charms.

A fine network of tiny wrinkles at the junction of the neck and shoulder showed that she was growing old, but with the aid of paint and powder she was still a pretty woman and her bright, dark eyes were very tender. Barnavaux' companions who had

come with him to this Saigon café-concert cast ardent glances at her.

And what about Barnavaux himself? Well, it was no new experience after all. Men like Barnavaux, born of peasant forefathers, unconsciously obey the most ancient traditions and are faithful only to the home woman, who mends the clothes and makes the soup. In the fulfilment of these duties the woman keeps a hold upon her man, and the man gives in because it is only fair and to his advantage that he should do so.

As for the other women, if they have a weakness for you, well, it may be pleasant or the reverse, that all depends. They can keep you well supplied with money, 'tis true, but you must be pretty hard up to take it, and for the moment Barnavaux had plenty. He was returning from the campaign in China with his pile, loot, in other words, which, when you come to think of it, is the most legitimate consequence of war: he who is capable of the greatest is also capable of the least, and the right to kill presupposes the right to steal.

And now, just at this very moment, when, with a belt full of money and, what is more,

banknotes, when he could have any and every woman for the asking, here was Madame Edmée, the singer at the European Music Hall, not only refusing his money but wanting him all to herself night and day. Barnavaux felt as unhappy as a child kept too long at the same game, and yet his comrades looked at him with envy. His pride was flattered, however, and without giving her a direct reply he deigned to ask:

"When is it your turn?"

"I've been on once; then there's the children's turn, and I come on again at the end with my pigeons. Do come home with me after, Barna. Please do, darling!"

Without vouchsafing a reply Barnavaux leaned over to the right and held his brown face under the ventilator-fan, which revolved with such rapidity that it looked like a whirling blur in the heavy, smoke-laden atmosphere.

His glance took in the strange, exotic scene before him. A Japanese juggler then occupied the stage, who, while balancing himself on a ladder with one hand, raised his two feet in the air, and juggled with

three huge balls in the other hand. Seated at the back of the stage, with her hands on her knees, sat the stout Wallachian singer awaiting her turn. The audience was almost exclusively masculine save for the wives of a few officials and planters. Opposite them, in a box, sat three well-to-do Chinamen, who gazed at the white women with looks of mingled desire and contempt.

The women's dresses and the sky-blue robes of the Chinamen were the only spots of colour in the room, for all the men wore white; white that looked glaring, and dazzled the eye under the brilliant electric lamps.

"All right, I'll come," said Barnavaux at last. "After the show is over then, at your place."

Madame Edmée thanked him with a happy caress of the hand upon his close-cropped head. She came in at the end of the performance only, and now sat down in a chair close to her soldier lover, making herself as unobtrusive as possible. As Barnavaux put down his cigarette, she snatched it up with a passionate gesture and put it between her lips.

"Hullo!" said Barnavaux, "it's your kids' turn now."

The curtain, which had dropped to the accompaniment of the Jap waltzing on one hand, now rose again. Two children stood facing each other before the footlights, a little boy of twelve in an Incroyable costume, and a girl still younger, dressed as Madame Angot: Prince Paul and Princess Armide, said the programme.

And they were a delightful and pitiful little couple. They were neither painted nor powdered, and were so fresh and young and pretty; their eyes were so frank and merry, in spite of the late hours, the hard life, all the things they had seen and all the things they knew. There they stood, singing the most horrible words with their shrill little voices, in the cracked, strident tones of children who sing too early.

"C'est ton chou, Lise, ton chou,
Ton chou qu'il me faut pour mes deux sous . . ."

These were the lines of Prince Paul, and he had been taught appropriate gestures to emphasise the vile words. I think it better not to quote the reply of Princess Armide.

In France there are laws that oppose the use and abuse of children in the theatres. In the colonies these laws are occasionally

enforced, but not often. There are other things to be done than to trouble about strolling players whom you will probably never see again, and who are there for your amusement. There are so few, so few chances of amusement, and so many greater evils, so many vices that pass uncorrected. Prince Paul and Princess Armide were too unimportant for anyone to trouble about them.

"It's disgusting!" cried Barnavaux. "Those kids should be in bed. What time do they go to bed?"

Madame Edmée could not understand. She was very fond of the children, but one has to live somehow. They were doing the same as she had always done; she knew no better.

"I'm off!" said Barnavaux, "if I've got to listen to kids saying things they ought to know nothing about, I'm off to Cholon. At any rate, the kids there are Chinese, and that's right and natural; it doesn't matter. But white children, *nom de Dieu*!"

"Barna," said Madame Edmée, "oh, don't go!"

When he was with her she knew, at any

rate, that he was not with any other woman. She was not alone with her dreadful horror of growing old and being unloved. Ah, there was so little time now in which men would find her desirable, would dare to love her!

"Where are you going, Barnavaux?"

"I've told you, to Cholon," replied Barnavaux roughly, "to the Chinese."

He picked up his helmet and strode out, making the glasses ring in his passage.

Madame Edmée rose without saying a word to Barnavaux' comrades. He had gone, and there was nothing further to interest her. She slipped through a little door hidden behind the bar, and reached the wings. In spite of the intense heat she shivered, as though bitterly cold.

Armide and Paul had taken off their costumes, and Paul was putting on a worn, blue sailor suit, while Armide with her hands raised above her head was waiting, like a full-grown actress, for the native dresser to put on her green Liberty frock. She was so tired she could hardly stand.

"When can we go?" she asked.

"After my turn, you know that quite well," answered Madame Edmée sharply.

"Oh dear!" said the child, "we've got to wait for that old number nine!"

Without replying Madame Edmée pulled off the black alpaca cover spread over the cage that contained her pigeons. Awakened by the bright glare of the lamps, they flapped their wings and pecked at the troughs full of seed moistened with a very weak decoction of opium and water. They then allowed themselves to be caught and placed upon a bamboo perch. There were more than twenty of them of every hue, and as the curtain rose Madame Edmée carried them on the stage.

A great silvery-white pigeon, balanced on the top of the perch, flew up, hovered motionless a moment, and then settled upon her head. He stood there firmly, fixing his pink, coral-like feet deep in her hair, as with swelling throat and open beak he fluttered his wings ceaselessly. Then simultaneously the rest of them winged their way upwards. First they mounted high above her head, then with lowered heads and motionless wings, came swiftly down, the feathers of their tails spread like fans; then, forming a circle, they flew round and round their mistress without the least appearance of fatigue.

Some of them looked like gold, others like pearly shells changed into birds, and it was impossible to distinguish the different shades of colour upon their wings and necks and breasts. They crossed and recrossed, mingled together, and peopled the air with their winged flight, separating for a moment only to mingle again almost as soon. Some of them looked like splashes of purple and blood-red, endowed with life and movement and passion. The whirling mass came nearer, brushing against her dress, her bosom, and her rapt face, which shone out among them like a sun surrounded by stars. And when she threw back her head, the great white pigeon spread his wings, and with his feet still embedded in her hair, strained upward as though he would soar aloft bearing her with him.

She really was quivering from head to foot. This trick was to her the emblem of her passionate love and desire, and she entered into it with an intensity that bordered on tears. She was lost in a maze of sound and movement in which her expectant desire almost realised its object. A shimmering green pigeon flew to her breast and nestled there with his beak to her lips.

Another, rose and flame-coloured, fell, straight as a dart, upon her neck and clung there, gently fluttering his wings, while a soft murmuring came from his swelling throat. She opened her arms wide, and the whole flock, quitting the vibrant air, covered the pale face and upright figure of the woman with a voluptuous cloak of wings.

. . . . . .

Armide and Paul had fallen asleep in a wicker armchair, where they lay side by side, breathing softly with closed eyes and arms relaxed. When Madame Edmée, with a cloak thrown over her theatre dress, awakened them, they were so weary they could scarcely stand. She led them by the hand to the lodging-house, undressed them, put them in the bed which they occupied in her room, and they resumed their dreamless sleep. Then she went to bed herself, but thinking only of Barnavaux.

"Where is he?" she thought. "What is he doing? Will he come?"

She felt humiliated, weary of life, and a choking sensation in her throat almost suffocated her. What, she thought, was the good of living; why could she not die? A feeling of numbness oppressed her, and

in her distress she imagined the pigeons circling round her once more, but this time they were trying to draw her down into a black abyss where she could not breathe.

At last the front door clanged, and she heard a man's footsteps. Barnavaux' footsteps! For the moment life held nothing further for her than the sound of his footsteps. It was he!

"Barna," she cried, "ah, how good you are!"

She could have gone down on her knees to him.

Barnavaux had been to all the low drinking-houses in Cholon, where he had drunk champagne like a *chef*, and whisky like an Englishman. There also clung to him the delicate perfume of opium which is so like that of boiling chocolate. He had not been smoking opium, however; that particular form of intoxication did not appeal to him. It was too slow a process, too dainty, one had to lie down upon a mat. But he thought it great fun to go to the opium dens and annoy the Chinamen who lay dreaming there beside the little lamp and the sacred bamboo. His eyes were shining; he was in the best of spirits, a trifle intoxi-

cated, but quite firm on his feet. And the love of this woman put a finishing touch to his triumph.

"After all!" he exclaimed, "after all!"

He sat down with the pride of a conqueror. Madame Edmée stretched out her arms and laid her head on his breast; they could hear the beating of their hearts. Suddenly a clear little voice said:

"Who is it?"

Armide was sitting up in bed. The noise of footsteps had awakened her, and she was gazing at them in the lamplight. Barnavaux stood up in confusion.

"Go to sleep," said Madame Edmée angrily, going over to the children's bed.

"No!" cried Barnavaux, "no! Not that, *nom de Dieu!* Not that!"

"Barna!" said Madame Edmée again, in a pleading voice.

But he had buckled on his belt and, slamming the door, left her for ever, going his way, dark and sombre as the night.

. . . . . .

The wind was blowing from the north-west, a cold but steady wind that did not trouble the *Devonia*. The great boat went

straight, without pitching, along the choppy waters.

Well muffled up in wraps the Passenger had placed his deck-chair astern, under the wind and due south, in the gangway near the first-class saloon. Close beside him was a channel containing the chain attached to the rudder, and each time the helmsman changed his course this chain, which was well-greased, slipped gently over the metal bearings, sending out a continuous hum as it did so. As the quivering blades of the screw beat the unresisting water, the great ship was filled with a perpetual throb. In the forepart of the vessel some pigeons were cooing, and these sounds combined had so monotonous an effect that the Passenger was about to fall asleep.

Then he heard a voice say :

"Monsieur, do not go to sleep. I want to ask you something!"

Opening his eyes, he saw before him a little fair girl in a green Liberty frock. The frock was pretty and so was the little girl, but her brown boots looked worn, and her general appearance was not that of a rich child, for there was something insolent in her gaze. The children of well-to-do people are nearly

always trustful, happy-looking, and sure of themselves, because they have been kindly treated; they look like little kings, sure of being obeyed, but they do not look insolent. Insolence is a defect common to schoolboys forced to submit to rules which they hate; to the children of the poor, whose hearts are proud and sensitive; to wicked, weak, and, generally speaking, unhappy folk. It is a form of sensitiveness.

The little girl's eyes were pathetic to see; although still pure, they were full of knowledge and disillusion.

"What is your name?" asked the Passenger.

"Armide," she replied. "You know me quite well, monsieur. I invented the crab races on board and you won the sweepstake, you know."

Yes, the Passenger knew quite well. Before leaving Southampton the ship's cook had bought some live crabs that the child had seen crawling about in a wicker basket. She had thereupon organised a whole system of racing which, curiously enough, had become the rage. A piece of meat was the goal, and planks radiating in all directions formed sectors. At the end

of each of these sectors was placed a famished crab. Each competitor was strictly forbidden to push his crab along, or to turn it round, if unfortunately it did not make backwards for the desired goal. But they were allowed to feed them, care for them, train them in the way they should go, give them stimulants, corrupt the cook to furnish them with advice as to which creature to bet on, and buy it from him at an exorbitant price. It is impossible to imagine the value of a racing crab on board ship.

The Passenger had won the sweepstake, the great sweepstake, Queen Victoria's Sweepstake, in which had taken part the best racers of Ramon Ramirez, Don Ramon Ramirez, the burly rancher of La Plata, less proud of his 200,000 head of cattle and countless herds of sheep than of his magnificent stud of crabs on board the *Devonia*. The first tin basin to larboard between the crew's quarters and the slaughter house contained his racers!

There was also the stud of the Yankee, Colonel MacKinnon: twelve fine animals specially fed on calves' kidneys. But North America could not prevail against La Plata, and La Plata herself had been vanquished

by France, in the person of the Passenger: a glorious feat, although the captain refused to enter it in his logbook.

The Passenger felt he must acquit himself of a debt of gratitude, so he said:

"What do you want me to do, Mademoiselle Armide?"

"Lift me up to one of the saloon windows so that I can see in," she replied.

He threw off his rugs and, standing up, lifted her as she had asked. Then with eager eyes she gazed at the interior of the room.

"How beautiful it is!" she said.

As in all steamers, the saloon occupied the whole of the stern. The three rows of tables, two along the walls, one in the centre, were already prepared for dinner. They sparkled with silver, with green-tinted glass for the Johannisberg and the Rudesheimer, and clear cut and bright as diamonds for the other wines. On the principal table stood an epergne of Sèvres china, representing a boat drawn by swans; the walls between each window were covered with pictures. Among the palms and ferns in these works of art flew birds as many-coloured as precious stones; ships in full sail entered enchanted ports; under golden

skies on the summit of a columned many-storied palace, the foundations of which were set in the sea, a beautiful lady stood in an expectant attitude singing. Facing the piano at the other end of the saloon, was a great staircase with a marble balustrade upon which stood statues of women holding lamps; on a panel in the vestibule was a picture of Amphitrite and her *cortège*, painted by some great artist. The body of the goddess, hardly veiled by the waves, appeared as a great pink rose seen through a cloud of misty green tritons; dolphins and nymphs surrounded her, and one of the tritons, a monster with the face of man and a body smooth and shining as a walrus covered with seaweed, presented his mistress with a branch of coral plucked from the depths, the moist brilliancy of which sparkled with light.

"How beautiful! How beautiful it is in there!" repeated Armide.

The saloon of great steamers is a kind of Holy of holies to which, for various reasons, little children are not admitted, the chief one being that they are liable to sudden attacks of *mal de mer*. They are accommodated in a special part of the vessel.

Here they have their meals, presided over by a trustworthy stewardess, and waited upon by their own nurses of both sexes, for, be it remembered, the Chinese and Hindus are excellent children's nurses, and that, no doubt, is why the provident custom of their country makes them wear skirts, and not trousers, like a real white gentleman. The children can play hide-and-seek there among the trunks, and sometimes go down into the hold with the chief steward, a journey full of delights because of the darkness and terror of the place.

On steamers of moderate size, the authorities also permit them to make use of the upper deck, like the grown-up first and second class passengers. Nevertheless there is a decided hierarchy among this youthful population, regulated by the amount which their parents pay. In the first place, it gives them the consciousness of belonging to different grades of society. The great thing, however, is that those of them whose parents are first-class passengers are sometimes allowed to enter the beautiful saloon during the afternoon, if accompanied and accounted for by the authors of their being. As they sip their glass of *sirop* or lemonade

they are subdued yet proud, and immediately on their return boast of their greatness to the others, the poor little unfortunates who have not gazed upon such glories.

While the Passenger was holding Armide in his arms he thought of all these things and drew his own conclusions. He said nothing, however, but only asked:

"Who is your mother?"

Armide, who had seen all she wished, slipped out of his arms. She knew that big people always exact a price for their kindness by asking questions. Generally the first thing was: "What is your name?" The second, especially if it were a gentleman: "What is your mother's name?" Kind and worthy people with no imagination generally went on to say: "How old are you?" and also "Can you read?" But some were still more indiscreet. Armide was ten, and knew how to read; she could truthfully answer that question, but her experience of life had so taught her to be suspicious of any attempt at conversation that she did not relish even the first question. She replied, however:

"Mother? She is Madame Edmée, the lady in blue on the deck over there."

Then she thought she might as well own up to the rest, as the nurses knew, and it was talked about on the boat, so she went on :

"My name is Princess Armide and my brother is called Prince Paul. That is what they put on the placards. We are going to New York to play."

"In a music-hall ?" asked the Passenger, smiling.

"Yes. You must have seen Madame Edmée's pigeons. Paul and I sing. We are artistes, a *troupe*, do you see ?"

Armide was much relieved at having explained the difficult situation. Besides, the Passenger looked kind, and when he stooped to kiss her she raised her face with much condescension. At that moment the sound of music was heard. Some one was sitting at the piano and the sound came out to them clear on the high notes, and somewhat muffled in the bass. The child's eyes shone more brightly.

"I suppose," she said, "you couldn't take me into the saloon ? I would be good."

The Passenger took her by the hand with a smile, and they went down the grand staircase. Slipping noiselessly in and

out of the tables Armide reached the piano.

"I know what the gentleman is playing," said she. "It is one of Madame Edmée's tunes, a Spanish dance. The dance is gay, but the words are not."

The accompaniment was meant to imitate the sound of tambourines and guitars, and the melody prisoned in the deep chords was slow and sad like a mourning woman surrounded by a band of madmen.

"Sing it, if you know it, little Armide," said the Passenger.

"I can't sing out loud," she murmured, "but I will say the words.

"En la torre mas alta
De Castel Martin,
E'un pajaro y canta
Coplas en latin.
Y en ellas dice
Che los enamorados
Siempre estan trieste.

"And what does it mean?"

"Listen!"

In the high tower
Of Castel Martin
A nightingale sings
Verses in Latin
And in these verses
He says that lovers
Are always sad

"Mademoiselle Armide," said the Passenger, "little girls of ten must not speak of love, especially to call it sad; that is sinning twice over. Now we will have a glass of lemonade and a game of draughts."

"I'd like some lemonade," said Armide, "especially if my brother may come too. But why don't you go and talk to Madame Edmée? Nobody on the boat ever speaks to her."

And that was how the Passenger was presented to Madame Edmée, and it caused a small scandal among the ladies on the boat, because Madame Edmée was not an actress, not even a music-hall singer nor a circus performer. She had perhaps been a little of all these at some time or another; but people well remembered having seen her in soldiers' and sailors' drinking-booths, performing with her pigeons. So they were shocked. It was so natural to be shocked. Madame Edmée was what cruel humanity despises more than anything in the world, a very poor and love-sick woman, nearly at the end of her youth and lovableness. Since the day when she had been abandoned by a rough and careless soldier, she had gone from Asia to Europe earning a miserable

livelihood, and was now journeying, still more haphazard, from Europe to America.

She felt as though she were living in one of those nightmares in which one is always falling, falling, and thinking: "I shall not be able to breathe until I reach the bottom, and when I reach it all will be over."

It is against nature to possess a sentimental soul and a voluptuous body. The soul is contaminated by all the stains and deceptions of the body, and one dies after a lifetime that seems to have held nothing but death agonies. Madame Edmée felt all the living fibres of her heart and body break one by one, and like all sick folk she never spoke to the Passenger of anything but her malady. Ah, people were wrong to purse up their lips and be shocked! There was nothing at which to be shocked!

Besides, a ship is respectable, perforce, like small towns. When, in a space of a few hundred square feet, each person had to live under the gaze of all; when the cabins nearly all contain two occupants of the same sex, who are strangers to each other before the voyage, and who spy upon and watch one another, it is not easy to

outrage morality. And yet there is nothing to do, the men are in greater number than the women; the days are long and during the afternoons there are many opportunities for flirtation. But the starlit, moonlit, electric-lit nights only exasperate such *galanteries* without in any way appeasing them. The great steamers force their way through the angry waves in an atmosphere teeming with desires and longings, and when the Almighty, whose ways are impenetrable, sends them all to the bottom never to rise again, He has not many sinners to forgive. When He looks upon the waters, His countenance need not veil itself as when He glances over the great cities, the woods, and the fields. And it is my earnest hope that He took all the passengers of the *Devonia* to His bosom, yes, all of them, millionaires, adventurers, innocent children, and also the strolling playwoman, who had sinned greatly, ah, yes, greatly—but who had been so unhappy!

Night was drawing in. The red globe of the sun disappeared in the western sea. Before it the water was mauve-coloured; then it turned into an immense field of blue scabious, and then into a parterre of

sad thoughts. A fresh breeze blew up, coming from the direction where the moon and the stars were slowly making their appearance.

"What is the good of so much water, monsieur, tell me," said Prince Paul to the Passenger.

"I don't know," he replied. "The sun draws it up into clouds, and the clouds turn into water and fall into the sea, and so it goes on."

"Yes," put in Madame Edmée, "and so it goes on! and what is the use of its going on?"

"I don't know," repeated the Passenger.

"In former days, when such things as religions existed, people thought they knew. But now no one knows."

He put his hand on Armide's fair hair.

"There are always the children," he said, "to begin all over again and to love life just as the little mists from the water love the sky—and so it goes on."

"But what difference does it make to us, to *us?*" said Madame Edmée, savagely.

"No difference," he replied, "except that we are afraid of falling into the ocean of the infinite—of dying. I am afraid

of death," he confessed, with a shiver. "I love to ponder, to arrange my thoughts, just as children love to see the world take shape before their eyes in the form of mind-pictures, and it is awful, awful to know that a time must come when I shall cease to be capable of thought."

. . . . . .

Fog! that fifth element, as the English have named it. But the *Devonia*, almost without slackening her pace, plied her course in spite of danger, because it is customary to do so, and also because time is money. But her siren bellowed ceaselessly and horribly. Think of a great bull, a bull more than a hundred yards in length, as high as a house and with lungs of iron, keeping up a continual roar: "I'm afraid of you! Beware of me! I'm afraid of you! Beware of me!" That is what the siren said, while the great, vibrating, quivering, undaunted vessel cleaved her passage through the waves.

The cold breath from the northern ice-fields, passing along the shores of Newfoundland, froze the damp and vapour on the masts and planks, and the bullocks doomed to the slaughter-house lifted their

heads, and wondered where the invisible and gigantic brother, who bellowed so mightily, lay hidden.

Princess Armide and Prince Paul crept timidly among the quiet beasts, dragging with them a woollen covering to protect Madame Edmée's pigeons from the cold. They quickly found the cage planted against the wall of the kitchens; the pigeons were shivering and dozing fitfully with their heads tucked under their folded wings. The big, silver-coloured male-bird, who, during the performances perched upon Madame Edmée's head, opened one eye for a moment, and went to sleep again, still shivering.

At that moment the *Devonia* came suddenly out of the fog; it seemed as though she had been transported thousands and thousands of miles away, into a country where there were both air and light. Bright little stars began to twinkle. From the bridge came a word of command, and the siren stopped short in the middle of a shriek with a kind of hiccough, as though she had suddenly been seized by the throat. The *Devonia* fairly bounded through the foam at a slightly accelerated pace.

The two little players looked at one another.

"We can go to sleep now," said Paul.

"Yes," said Armide, "the great beast has stopped roaring and we don't have performances on board. We needn't wait for number nine to be over before we can go to bed. We can sleep until we get to New York."

"Jolly!" said Paul.

They were quite happy. Long habit had taught them to look upon such voyages as holidays in their hard, wandering life.

A few minutes later they were sound asleep in their bunks. Madame Edmée looked at them sadly and bitterly, but without tears. She was thinking of the soldier who had left her, her last lover, of old age looming ahead, and of the pain and uselessness of life.

And it was on that very night, when her heart felt heavy to breaking, that the hour of her deliverance sounded.

For on that night the *Devonia* was struck by the heavy piece of wreckage drifting north, under cover of the smooth, dense, treacherous water. It seemed, wreck that it was, to take a delight in causing another

wreck, just in the same way that evil-doers, brought to perdition by their own misdeeds, come back to ruin other souls, and drag them down to depths from which they themselves can never hope to rise. Just at the moment when the sky was clearest and starriest, the siren silenced, and the *Devonia* relieved of anxiety, the wicked, hypocritical thing ripped her up, clawed open her entrails and capsized her.

Her agony was a bare half-hour of spasmodic effort and violent sobs, but her sobs were explosions that shattered the watertight bulkheads and her efforts to get free tore her ribs asunder.

Paul and Armide were not so very frightened when a blue-jerseyed sailor took them in his arms and put them in the boat that was instantly lowered into the sea.

At that moment they saw the Passenger come on deck. He was but half clothed and frozen with the bitter cold. "Look out!" some one called to him.

The warning came too late. The mast, still to be found on all steamers for the hoisting of signals or flags, had just smashed into three parts. Two of these were not

completely severed, and as they fell they came nearer together, like the points of a gigantic compass. These enormous jaws seized the Passenger by the middle of the body and ground him very slowly, very slowly. And he had been so afraid to die, so loath to stop thinking! What were his thoughts during these long, awful moments? What does one see and think when one is dying?

They had turned Armide and Paul away from the horror of the sight; it was too great for them to grasp and they did not fully realise it. This unconsciousness is a favour granted by Providence to children and the innocent creatures of wood and field. All they saw was fat Madame Ramirez, the wife of the rancher from La Plata—her bulk further increased by the life-belt strapped round her—clinging to a little, slender lieutenant, and crying: "Save me! oh, save me!" A hippopotamus embracing a goat!

Then, in spite of the universal terror, a great, convulsive laugh went up from all the witnesses, a laugh such as is heard sometimes at moments like these, when the whole of the human organism is momentarily

thrown out of gear. Armide and Paul laughed with the others, but they did not suffer as they laughed. Some of the men and women literally died of laughing, because their hearts were diseased, or because drink and riotous living had long ruined their constitutions; a man must be very healthy to stand the brutal attack of great and sudden danger, healthier than are most civilised human beings. When Madame Edmée was lowered into the boat beside her two children she was a dying woman.

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The boat held out for seven days and seven nights, and was picked up by the schooner *Hilda*. That is how details of the disaster became known. There were thirty-five of them in the boat, dying by inches. Towards the end, those who still retained a feeble flicker of life did not even trouble to throw out the dead, they were too weak. But they did not suffer over much, except those who drank sea-water—for there was a little biscuit on board, but no fresh water—and they went mad. There was Bazoille, for instance, the look-out man, who had got it into

his head that he could hear men calling from the hold where they had been locked in: and the boat an open one! Under the planks that Bazoille, haggard and stark-mad, struck with fists and feet, there was nothing, nothing but the sea, the bottomless abyss, containing unknown beasts seeking something to devour! However, he heard nothing of what the others said to him, and only listened to his sick fancies. It was worse for the others than for him, and he must have been a good fellow, for madness had come to him because of his thought for others. But he got hold of an axe to break through the planks and reach his comrades and that is why they tried to tie him down, when he leaped over the side in a second, and it was all over. The greedy water hardly made a sound as it swallowed him up, and no one in the boat looked either at him or at one another. They were very cold, for they had not had time to clothe themselves on leaving the *Devonia*, and many of them were half-naked. They crouched like beasts under the tarred sail in the bottom of the boat, like beasts tied together and huddled pell-mell in carts on their way to the slaughter-

house. Most of them had given in, and remained motionless, but their brains were still active. As soon as the bitter cold thoroughly numbs the body, so that all feeling disappears, death comes gently, mounting upwards, unresisting, to the heart and head, which are the last to go. Like one of those vessels used by the printers, filled with molten lead drawn from the furnace and left to stand with here and there the metal still boiling and bubbling, while the rest is motionless and hard, that is all that remained of Madame Edmée. She was unconscious.

Wrapped in one another's arms, Paul and Armide were making a better fight. Children are so full of life. Nature is so loath for them to die before they have lived their allotted span. But the tender, delicate, flower-like bodies of these poor little mites had turned almost black, and their eyes seemed to fill the whole of their face. Fortunately, they did not know what was going on; they were sleepy, that was all, sleepier than they had ever been before in their poor little lives, when they had never been able to get sufficient rest. Now that they were able to sleep as long as they liked,

they found they could no longer close their wide-open eyes.

Suddenly Paul exclaimed, almost distinctly :

"The pigeons!"

There was a fluttering of wings above the boat. Armide and Paul recognised the pigeons, but they looked larger and more indistinct than they had ever seen them, and as though surrounded with mist. They circled nearer and nearer, flying round and round above the drifting boat, long since abandoned to the mercy of the waves.

Yes, it was the pigeons. As is customary, their cages had been set open and thrown into the sea—a feeble succour indeed for the drowning—as soon as the ship was struck. So they had taken flight like the true adventurers they were. They had travelled far and wide seeking land where they could find food and water. But these days were worse than the days of the flood. As far as their strength had taken them they had seen nothing but salt waves and dreadful icebergs, and that is why, vanquished, they returned to their starting-point. They took the poor little stricken boat trembling on the cruel waters for a place of refuge. They were

men on it—men. No doubt they reasoned that men who, when so inclined, killed dumb creatures could also give life when they wished. With limp feet and drooping, exhausted wings, they flew down, confidently begging for succour, and, without comprehending, they came into contact with the agonies of death. The great silver pigeon with the swelling throat knew Madame Edmée, and falling with outspread wings, nestled to her for the last time.

"The pigeons," murmured Armide, who was delirious. "It is their turn, the last number. It's nearly over, and we can go soon!"

And soon after, as she had said, Armide and Paul went away to the country of eternal sleep.

VICTORY

To Rudyard Kipling, who wrote
"The Finest Story in the World."

AFTER his last campaign in North Tonkin, Barnavaux was sent back to France. He had been shifted about from Toulon to Cherbourg, from Cherbourg to Rochefort, and then, as it seems essential that Paris should be turned into a military museum, where idlers can gaze their fill at specimens of every branch of the army, he was eventually quartered at the Cherche-Midi military prison. I found him there one Sunday, sitting on a stone bench in the yard. Barnavaux was not on duty, and yet he had not gone out. His sleeves were decorated with a sergeant's stripes and he caught me looking at them with considerable astonishment.

"Yes," he replied, to my mute question. "I made up my mind to get promotion. Do you know how old I am? Thirty-five! I am old, horribly old; I feel as if I had all the age of the world on my shoulders.

It's all up! I'm no good as a soldier now, so I must turn sergeant."

"Barnavaux," I said, "when you have no respect for hierarchy even where it concerns yourself, I fear for your eternal salvation. That is the sin against the Holy Ghost, the only one that shall never be forgiven!"

"You don't understand what I mean," he returned. "I mean that I've been promoted and if I can manage to go ahead—for it isn't such an easy matter, it doesn't take much to reduce a man to the ranks—it is because of the pension, so that I can get a job somewhere and wear a livery instead of a uniform. I might usher in the millionaires who wait in a queue before the offices of the Minister of Finance. Or I might be a *huissier* in a black suit and silver chain seated behind a green table containing a red blotter and black inkstand. That is what they call 'becoming a modest servant of the State!' I have read that sort of thing in the papers."

"Well," I said, "I don't think you'll need pity!"

"I'm not saying that I shall! At any

rate it will be better than the dog's life I've led for the last twelve years."

When Barnavaux runs down the soldier's life I know he is not himself. He went on:

"Look at the place we're in! They tell me it used to be the mansion of some *grand seigneur*. After that it became a barracks. Now they put prisoners here, poor devils! And soon they're going to pull the whole place down to make a boulevard. Nothing in the place of something. It's just the same with the Colonial infantry, it's a damned fraud nowadays. The *marsouins* used to be soldiers; now they are criminals. Not that you can't make a soldier out of a criminal, I'm not saying that. But you must teach them *l'honneur du corps*. That will take the place of any other honour. Why don't they learn that sort of thing now? Why are they not taught it?"

It was the middle of summer and the sun poured down on the pavements. There was also the horrible smell that comes in the hot weather from the dried-up drains.

"Do you remember the summer in Annam?" said Barnavaux again. "It is much hotter than here, but it smells of jasmine and that other plant, you know,

ylang, which leaves such a strong scent on your fingers if you only crush one little leaf, just one!"

Barnavaux worried me, for he was philosophising, talking politics almost, and was home-sick for a country not his own. I felt it was necessary to change the drift of his thoughts, so I took him for a long walk, and we had lunch in an arbour on the banks of the Marne, surrounded by silent fishermen. When he rose from table he had recovered some of his usual serenity, and, as luck would have it, we directed our steps towards Champigny-la-Bataille, where is the Théâtre de la Nature.

The performances take place in a huge old garden, probably deserted since 1870. Very likely there was fighting there during the siege, for the walls are broken away, as though battlemented; and, when the actors fire off their guns, it gives you a little shiver as you think of those far-away, terrible days. But now, as I said before, it is only a garden, grand, peaceful and beautiful. The trees are covered with moss and make a more beautiful, more tragic background than any stage scenery. The plays are acted on a wide stretch of grass backed by a

hillock. The actors ascend and descend a real stairway cut out of the rock, and the only drawback is the painted and wholly unnecessary canvas, representing a fortress.

That day they were playing a piece, taken, I think, from the terrible adventures of two officers sent on a mission to Nigeria who refused to obey an order to retreat, and killed the colonel in command of the retreating column. The scene, however, had been changed from Central Africa to the Sahara, and commencing as it did in the form of an anti-militarist drama, it abruptly changed into a piece that might have been written by Corneille.

The criminal officer, a brute who has ordered all the head-men of a village to be shot, after promising them freedom if they will lay down their arms, a monster maddened by blood and drink who makes light of all the murders he has committed, hearing that he is found out, says to himself:

"So they have declared that the law no longer protects me! Very well, I will remain here and found a kingdom of my own. I have taken this country and I intend to keep it."

Believing he can count on his native

Spahis, he sends for the non-commissioned officer Bachir and expounds his plans.

"Sidi lieutenant," replied Bachir, "we loved you. We looked upon you as made of something different to ourselves. Had you ordered me to kill myself I would have done so without a murmur. But now it is quite different. When my comrades see the corpses of those whom you have destroyed, the corpses of their brothers, they will kill you. Well, men in the pay of the French government may not kill a French officer —here is your revolver."

"Kill myself!" exclaims d'Epernon, "kill myself! you don't know me!"

And he begins to sing, the fool, to sing the old song:

"Nous n'irons plus au bois,
Les lauriers sont coupés."

Ah, yes! they were cut down for an assassin like himself! And just as he is in the act of refusing to kill himelf it is evident that he feels that suicide is the only way out for him.

"And did you imagine that I needed you, my fine fellow, to tell me what I had to do. The fellow gives advice and forgets his

place! Quartermaster Bachir, remember to whom you are speaking."

That was a good hit, you know. Barnavaux grunted approval as he heard it and saw the man draw himself up and stand at attention.

"Quartermaster Bachir, you take the command of the column."

"Good, *mon lieutenant!*"

"Return to In-Salah in short marches of twenty kilometres. It is useless to tire the horses."

"Good, *mon lieutenant!*"

"You will draw up a report on—on all that has taken place."

"Good, *mon lieutenant!*"

"Now I can rest. Farewell, Bachir."

And Bachir, bending nearly double, kisses his hand in Arab fashion. Then all that is heard is a revolver shot somewhere away in the bush.

. . . . . .

The sun had gone down low in the west, and the wind was blowing gently through the green branches of the trees. The sky was the colour of clear gold. People may make fun of open-air theatres, because there are so many of them nowadays, but

it is certain they fill you with a feeling different from that produced by the ordinary theatres where you have a roof to protect you and electric lamps to lighten your darkness. It is a deeper, more primitive feeling. Some of the words seem to strike against the trees before they come back to you, full of a stronger and more poignant meaning. For example, if you want to see wrestling in Paris, you have to go to some booth or café-concert, while in Switzerland the contest takes place in a green field at the foot of a mountain, and gives you the impression of some religious rite. It is the same in these theatres that have the sky for covering: the words spoken there are invested with an added majesty.

"Well?" I said to Barnavaux.

He is a simple soul and there was a lump in his throat. He blew his nose vigorously as he replied:

"The man who wrote that is no fool. He knows a thing or two about the desert, and he's not far out about the Touareg Hoggar, the Aydjer or the Aoullimidden. Then the end is fine and made a great impression on me. But when the men

refuse to follow their chief—and I know what is alluded to, it didn't happen in the Sahara, but in the Soudan a few years ago, didn't it?—well, they haven't hit upon the right reason for the faithfulness of the Senegalese. They don't think as we do, and know nothing of devotion to the colours or of *esprit de corps*. But I know what they were thinking—I was there myself."

"Well?" I inquired.

"It's a bit complicated. I'm not good at explaining things, it's not in my line. However, I will try and make it clear to you: as far as the Senegalese were concerned *there was a contract signed in Senegal*. That's what it was!"

"You are right, I don't follow," said I.

"There was a contract signed in Senegal," repeated Barnavaux. "And those niggers wanted to get back to Senegal to receive their share of the money. Then their wives and fields were there, their country, in fact. That was the chief reason why they would not stay in Nigeria, playing at being great chiefs. But that is not the only one. There was also *the might of the paper*.

"That's difficult to explain, too; however, I'll try. Suppose a marabout gives

a charm to a Mahommedan Tirailleur in the shape of an amulet, to preserve him against bullets or to make him loved by women, it is the words written on the paper by the marabout that *compel* events, that force the guns not to harm and the women to love him. Now the contract they had made with France was on paper, a paper they considered as mysterious and powerful as any marabout's, and they believed that if they failed to carry out their share of the contract some great misfortune would overtake them in this world—perhaps they would be haunted by avenging spirits who would drag them along by the feet—I expect that in former days, when white men were as yet uncivilised, they were in the habit of making some such oath."

"And yet that is what they called honour, Barnavaux," I answered.

"Yes," said Barnavaux thoughtfully, "perhaps that is what they understood by honour."

He found these ideas rather difficult to follow, but went on, as though afraid of the thoughts he was discovering in himself:

"And so, nowadays, when people don't believe in magic and sorcery, when they

don't realise the beauty and power of words, the only people, who, I take it, are in the right are those who, in the present age, think only of themselves. Rich folk, for instance, revolutionaries and the new type of Colonial infantry recruit. And so they were right, those fellows in the Soudan who killed their comrades in order to be made chiefs. If so, I have been in the wrong all this time! I've been a fool! a fool!"

With an impatient foot he struck the rocky ground on which the grass was now triumphantly growing.

"They've made a fool of me! For twelve years I've been wandering round, and risking my life in countries I can't forget, and the only reward I have is to be able to say: 'I'm still alive! here's another day!' The only countries that remain for ever in a man's thoughts are those where he has feared and faced death. And they've returned me nothing, and I shall never see them again; they will be like the dreams I used to have when I was a little chap living with my father, a baker, at Choisy-le-Roi. I used to dream I was eating hot cakes and then to wake up with an empty stomach."

Ah, it was not easy to answer Barnavaux. In former days when the Gauls and Germans roamed the world over, they took with them their wives and little ones, and those who conquered in battle claimed for their own the land on which the struggle took place; they cultivated it, it was theirs. How different are things nowadays, from the migrations of those young warriors and their women; there were no old men, no shirkers, no useless people then! what fine races, what noble aristocracies they must have founded!

But Barnavaux was labouring under the impression that he had fought twelve years for nothing, or only for others, which, in his opinion, came to the same thing. For a century at least, Frenchmen have their own individual ambitions and will not work for any but themselves. Unless one keeps this fact well in mind it is impossible to understand anything that takes place in France to-day. The French lower classes are not ignorant enough to submit, like fine, well-trained horses, who win fortunes for their owners' and end their existence as cab-hacks; but they are not well-informed enough yet, not *great* enough to realise that they have

an interest in the concern—in the beautiful and ancient land in which they live, the first country in the world—and they hav lost the meaning of the word devotion. Barnavaux was now becoming imbued with the same idea that obsesses most Frenchmen and troubles the greater number of them, that he was unjustly treated, and that he had worked and struggled all his life in vain. Ah, how could I put him right? how could I explain things to him?

. . . . . .

After dining in the same arbour where we had lunched in the morning I took him home with me. He knew where things were kept, and immediately reached up to the mantelpiece for a long pewter pipe from Annam, one of those that you smoke with a lighted coal on the bowl.

"Listen," I said, "I want to read you a story I have written, and I want to explain to you how it affects you—all of us in France and Europe."

"What is it about?" he asked.

"You will see. It happened long ago, in the days you know but little about; but you will see the point when I get to the end of the tale."

He put the glowing coal on the tobacco, drew in a deep mouthful of smoke, and composed himself to listen.

"Stachys," said Agabus in a whisper, "have you any more of those dried chestnuts that you got at Tarente. Give me a few. I will give you a quarter of an hour's sleep to-night in exchange."

Loosing his oar with one hand, Stachys attempted to reach the wallet hanging at his right side. The lash of a whip stung him on the shoulder, and he resumed his rowing without a murmur.

In the falling light the keel of the galley looked like the upturned corpse of some monstrous animal. It was a trireme. On the deck the Thranites, sheltered from the sun by a tent, rowed three abreast, with oars as long and thin as the legs of a water-fly. They were sturdy, fearless slaves, and able, during battle, to sit immovable at their oars under the rain of arrows shot at them by the archers fore and aft on the enemy's ships. The confidence placed in these men gave them certain privileges, and made of them the aristocracy of the galley-slaves. The rowers below envied them. The Zygites,

two to each oar, could not even raise their heads without striking against the beams of the deck. Under them again, came the Thalamites, each manipulating a heavy oar that protruded from the round port-holes nearly level with the water.

Six feet above the hold was a long plank running the whole length of the boat, on which a man kept up a continual pacing backwards and forwards; it was Herodion, the *incitator*, the slave-keeper. He had formerly been a gladiator, and was condemned to the galleys for murder; like the others he had rowed, bent double under the lash, and panted in the sweltering heat. He himself could not imagine how it came to pass that he had been able to survive so many of his comrades who had never been unchained from their benches until they were thrown overboard. And as a reward for not having succumbed and because he was strong and savage they had made him *incitator*. With a whip made of Nile hippopotamus hide in his hand, he struck right and left, incessantly pacing up and down upon his plank like an imprisoned wild beast.

Stachys was in the third row of Thalamites, at the very bottom of the hold. His mind

had become so weakened that he hardly felt the extent of his misery. The days in his sea-cellar, or in the hovels where the rowers were huddled pell-mell at the end of a campaign, were much the same as the nights; he hardly noticed them. And yet, after the midday repast, the blood beat more rapidly in his temples, and then he remembered the town of Joppa, his birthplace. There was a hill with palm and orange trees that unfurled their luxuriant foliage right down to the sea-shore, hiding from view the terraced houses and earthen huts with their wooden porticoes. He had lived with his mother in one of these huts when he was a little boy. Later he had learned to read Greek, and had become the steward of a kind master. But he had stolen money entrusted to him, and had been sold to a Roman pro-consul for the galleys. The monotony of his miserable existence dulled his thoughts for the most part, and life or death mattered little to him; only very trivial things interested him now: for instance, one day one of the Zygites above him had slipped and remained hanging from the chain fastened to his foot. Stachys still laughed when he thought of it.

As long as the rowers remained in the trireme, this chain was never removed; under them was a filthy pool of water, emptied daily by slaves carrying copper vessels. The rowers despised these unfortunates, and would secretly kick at them with their iron-bound feet. In the depth of their ignorant souls they were jealous of such ignoble work, because it was easy.

None of the Thalamites disliked Herodion; they had grown quite accustomed to blows and, like dogs, they felt the need of some one to command them. Their duty was to row, and the slave-keeper supplied the brains necessary to guide the perpetual movement of their arms; but they hated the Zygites, who would take advantage of their position immediately above them to give them sly kicks. They also hated the respectful way in which Herodion spoke of the rowers on deck; they hated the tent that covered them, and also the courage with which they faced danger; all these things filled them with fury.

And at night, also, the trireme continued her course, but more slowly. One row in three stopped work, and each man was thus able to get a few hours' sleep.

They had started from Ostia and were going towards the East. That was all Stachys had been able to make out, for he was in perpetual darkness, daylight only entering through the port-holes. One morning, however, a voice of command rang out.

Herodion's whip fell more frequently, and the trireme travelled at a greater pace. Now and again one or another of the men was ordered to cease rowing, and then the boat turned round so quickly that their heads swam and they experienced a feeling of intoxication, part pleasure and part pain, as one experiences when driving very quickly down a steep slope. On deck a great clamour was going on, the sound of clanking coats of mail and of shields falling with a clatter to the ground. Trumpets brayed out until the sound echoed again; further off other trumpets replied so that the air was full of sounds, like cattle calling to one another across the fields. The atmosphere was charged with terror and excitement.

"A great battle must be going on up there," said Stachys, "a great battle!"

And the supple thong bit into his back.

The whole ship was quivering, the galley-

slaves breathing all together in great gasps, and Herodion, his eyes almost starting out of his head, bellowed commands. Suddenly Agabus turned livid and fell face downward, in the filthy pool at the bottom of the hold. He had broken a blood vessel. Herodion sprang forward, and lifted him so that he should not suffocate, and the slaves were touched at this proof of their master's care.

"Apollo!" murmured Stachys. "Oh, sun of Heliopolis!"

A great clamour arose from the sea, a clamour of Greek, Latin, Syrian and Egyptian words, together with the moans of drowning or mortally wounded men.

"It is a battle, a great battle!"

A sudden violent shock made itself felt in the hold. On one side of the vessel every oar was simultaneously broken. Another galley had tried to stave in their vessel and had failed in the attempt. Dreadful groans arose from the wretched slaves, who were precipitated upon one another as though they had been cut down with a scythe, limbs broken and chests crushed. Blood spurted on the walls and ran along the benches. Splinters of wood flew about

like arrows amongst the writhing mass of men. One of Stachys' eyes was put out.

The tumult lasted a long time, but at length calmed down. Slaves descended into the hold to carry away the dead; the benches were washed down and they were all fed. But Stachys could not eat; he was feverish and in great pain. The sun, peeping in through the port-holes, told him that their course lay southwards, and for six days and nights they followed this direction.

On the morning of the seventh day they stopped. The Thalamites, who knew the Mediterranean well, and had the strange, divining faculty possessed by all draught beasts, knew without being told by Herodion that they had just entered the port of Alexandria.

They knew this because of the peculiar odour of the still water, which is never the same in any two ports. Evidently there was a large crowd of people on the jetty, for a great uproar could be heard away in the distance; the shrill tones of women, beginning very high up in the scale, slowly descending and then ascending before they finally died away, lost in the deeper voices of the men. The words "Oktabianos

Kaisar," pronounced in the Greek fashion, could occasionally be heard.

The trireme was close to a high quay, and suddenly the galley-slaves saw something against the timbers of the vessel, something falling gently into the water; a rain of something much softer than real rain, a slow, light and pearly shower. Herodion, half on deck, and craning his neck through the hatchway, cried:

"Roses! Roses! The people of Alexandria are throwing us roses!"

And he pushed a heap of petals down on the slaves.

They fell gently, and lay on bare and bleeding shoulders. Their perfume mingled with the stench from the cesspool and the smell of blood.

Then, bewildered at the sight, the unfortunates cried as with one voice from the depths of their eternal darkness:

"Herodion! Herodion! why do the people of Alexandria throw us flowers?"

And in reply Herodion roared:

"Brutes! Beasts! It is because of the victory *we* have gained at Actium!"

"Yes," said Barnavaux, "I understand.

They had gained the battle, those poor devils rowing in the hold among the vermin and the lashes. They won it! But what good did it do them? tell me that. They did not even know they had done it—no one ever did before you suggested it."

"Oh, yes," I replied, "people did know it. They knew it, because the battle of Actium was perhaps the greatest battle ever fought. It was necessary to decide who were to be the masters of the world, the Asiatics or Africans, or the white people, the people of Europe: ourselves, Barnavaux, ourselves. If those poor devils who were being flogged in the galleys had not conquered, we should have been working for the others to-day."

"The others?" exclaimed Barnavaux. "The blacks of the Nile, the Arabs and the men of Syria with their big, hooked noses. They would have been the masters? If we had not smashed them, they would have smashed us? Yes, it is true: when one nation is keeping quiet, another is advancing. What rot it is to speak of peace! arrant rot. People are fighting somewhere all the time, individuals, nations and races, even during so-called peace. People fight as to who shall make the most money, or have the most

children. They fight with the custom officers. And war with lances, arrows, rifles, cannons, and ironclads is only the inevitable end of that universal war that we call peace. *Real* war only takes place because it is less dangerous, less loathsome, and less killing than the hypocritical wars of peace. That was the kind of fight waged by the rowers at Actium, and had they not conquered, they would not even have been able to earn their bread by rowing on merchant vessels. The others, the enemy, the Niggers, the Arabs, the Syrians, and the yellow people from Asia would have taken their place. Then fame and glory are only other words for daily bread!"

He stopped a moment, bewildered.

"Why don't they explain these things to us, here in France? Tell me: I—I, Barnavaux, have really done my share? I have earned my bread, helped on the cause of humanity, and added to the glory of the white race?"

"I think so," I said.

THE END

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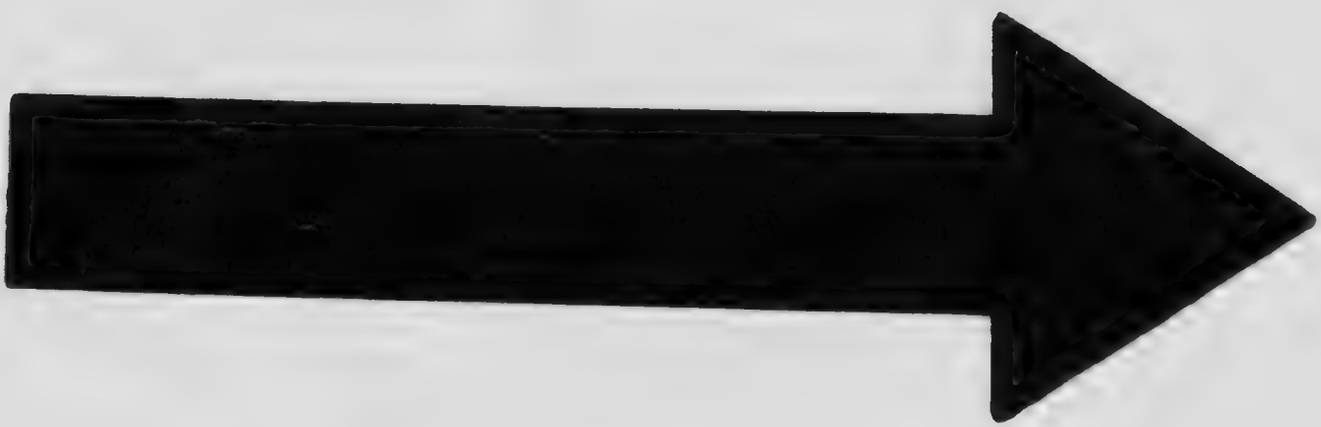

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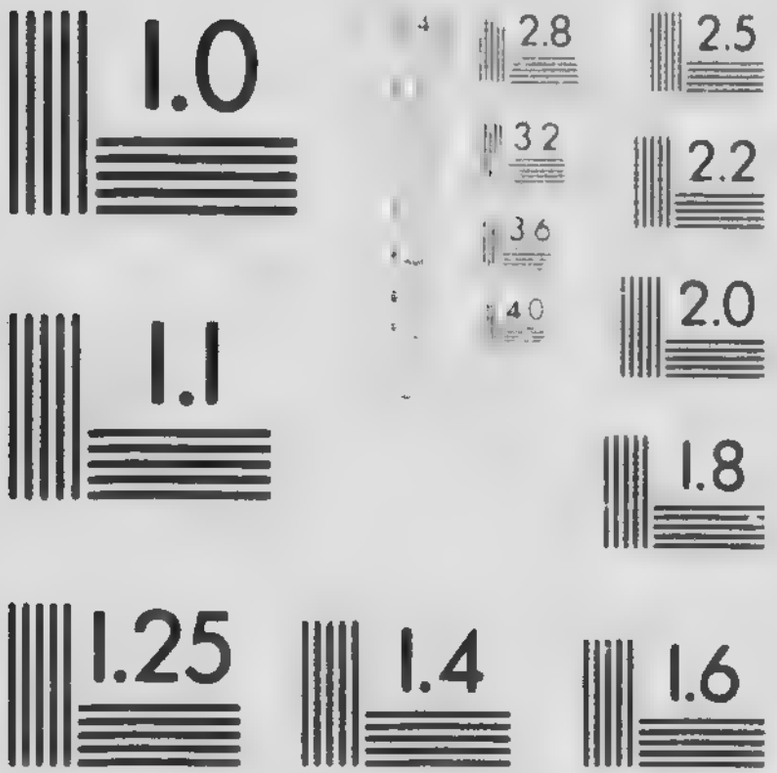

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